

RESPONSE TO BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL'S CONSULTATION ON 20MPH ZONES AND LIMITS

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As the MP for Birmingham Northfield I welcome the opportunity to make a submission to Birmingham City Council's consultation on 20mph zones.

This consultation asks for views on the principles of 20mph speed limits, and the type of locations where they are to be implemented. This response focuses on the need to properly consider specific contexts and conduct safety assessments that will determine how to most effectively reduce collisions and actively make roads safer.

20mph zones can be useful components in safer road strategies but they are not a 'silver bullet' for improving road safety. The goal of Birmingham's road safety strategy should be to build and manage safer roads and save lives, not to reduce speeds as an end point in itself.

Background

1. I welcome the City Council's focus on building safer and more sustainable communities in Birmingham. Although road collisions in the city have been declining in line with national trends, there is still much more to do to make our roads safer. Eight people are injured, and one seriously injured, in collisions in the city every day. Every two weeks someone is killed on Birmingham's roads.
2. Birmingham has committed to a target of reducing the number of killed and seriously injured (KSI) casualties to an average of 394 per year by 2015 – which would be over 17% drop in the current level.
3. We need to approach road safety in a comprehensive and coordinated way, and in that regard I welcome the Council's approach to tackle speed alongside other behavioural and road safety interventions. I support the emphasis on securing safe and credible driving speeds which have public adherence and acceptance and the need for education and awareness campaigns – as well as limits – to achieve this.

20 mph speeds

4. It is rightly pointed out that although it is only one of many factors involved in road collisions, speed is crucial for road safety. Evidence from places such as Portsmouth – which has achieved a 22% decrease in casualties between 2007-2010 – demonstrates that slower speeds can have a major role in helping to save lives.ⁱ
5. Reducing speeds to levels more appropriate to the roads concerned is not only important policy tool for improving road safety, but, by promoting more effective use of shared space, it can also encourage active travel (increased walking and cycling) and improve health and wellbeing. Encouraging active travel is important to cut carbon emissions too.
6. This consultation proposes that speeds are reduced in "residential areas." If the policy is adopted, definitions will be important. Research suggests 20mph may be most appropriate in locations where space is shared closely between cars and pedestrians/cyclists and where a conflicted use of space between different modes of transport is most likely to occur.ⁱⁱ
7. However simply designating particular roads as 20mph zones is not necessarily the same as reducing speeds on those roads in practice. Enforcement must therefore also be part of the equation. If the two are not considered hand in hand, the practical impact of any change will be reduced and the

credibility of the policy as a whole will be undermined. In any roll-out of 20mph zones it is therefore important to identify where such a change will have most effect and command public confidence, and be enforceable in practice. 20mph zones are already in place in and near a number of schools in the city, and implementing such zones in other appropriate areas close to schools would be practical early options for speed reduction initiatives in Birmingham.

8. **While they can make an important contribution, 20mph limits are not a ‘silver bullet’ for road safety.** The aim should be to create safer roads and save lives, not to simply declare a reduction in the speed limit. The appropriateness or priority given to speed reduction proposals on individual roads should be judged in that context. To do otherwise may mean that resources are not targeted on initiatives which would be most effective in promoting road safety in a particular context.

Safer systems

9. **Adopting a sustainable approach to safety is crucially important.** In this regard I recommend that the Council consider the approach developed by the Institute of Road Safety Road Safety Research in the Netherlands, which focuses on how to create a sustainably safe road traffic system – one in which infrastructure is designed inherently to reduce crash risk, and should a crash occur the process followed drastically cuts risk of severe injury.ⁱⁱⁱ
10. Central to the sustainable safety approach is the integration of different elements of speed management – safe and credible speed limits, vehicle and infrastructure design, the education and behaviour of road users, enforcement and the post-crash response. It also means integrating safety decisions with broader community goals – including those for economic growth, environmental protection and health and wellbeing.
11. The Institute of Road Safety Research stresses the importance safe speed assessments to determine what is required to make a road safer. The focus should be on preventing conflicts by separating different types of traffic – e.g. through properly segregated cycle lanes. Where conflicted use of space between road users is unavoidable (e.g. at a junction outside a school) then lower speed limits should be implemented. Ensuring a lower speed limit is credible and adhered to may require also require adapting the road image, additional enforcement and driver awareness.^{iv}
12. **Safety assessments should be the first stage, whether or not of the City Council’s goes ahead with its proposed role out of the 20mph limits.** In addition the City must commit to undertaking a safety assessment (that focuses on the needs of pedestrians and cyclists) for all new transport and infrastructure projects, in the same way as economic and equality impact assessments are made. This would represent the local implementation of a commitment made by the Labour Party - who will introduce cycle assessments for all transport schemes to mainstream cycling into our transport system. Assessments will also mitigate the need to ‘retro-fit’ speed limits and safety measures on roads.
13. The City Council could consider mapping the city to highlight roads with the poorest safety records, which would guide safety assessments and determine what interventions are required.
14. Given the importance of proper assessment and consultation to determine what will make a road safer in any given area, I welcome the open and inclusive process consultation taken forward by the City Council on this issue to date and **support the continuation of full public consultation as the process continues across Birmingham.**

ⁱ Birmingham City Council, Green Paper: Birmingham Mobility Action Plan- Delivering a Journey for the Future, November 2013.

ⁱⁱ Fred Wegman, SWOV Institute for Road Safety Research, ‘Safer Roads and Mobility Speed Management’, January 2013

ⁱⁱⁱ SWOV Institute for Road Safety Research, Advancing Sustainable Safety – National Road Safety Outlook 2005-2020 (2006)

^{iv} Fred Wegman, SWOV Institute for Road Safety Research, ‘Safer Roads and Mobility Speed Management’, January 2013