

Enterprise and Learning Committee

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Purpose

This paper is presented as written evidence for consideration by the Enterprise and Learning Committee in response to its inquiry on Trunk Roads and Casualty Reduction.

Background

1. About Living Streets

2. Living Streets is the national charity that stands up for pedestrians. With our supporters we work to create safe, attractive and enjoyable streets, where people want to walk. We work with professionals and politicians to make sure every community can enjoy vibrant streets and public spaces.

3. The history of Living Streets demonstrates the strength of our agenda. We were formed in 1929, as the Pedestrians Association, and have grown to include a network of 100 branches and affiliated groups, 28 local authority members and a growing number of corporate supporters. As well as working to influence policy on a national and local level, we also carry out a range of practical work to train professionals in good street design, and enable local communities to improve their own neighbourhoods. We run high profile campaigns such as Walk to School and Walking Works, to encourage people to increase their walking levels and realise a vision of vibrant, living streets across the UK.

4. This paper focuses on speed limits, police presence and street design with regard to trunk roads and casualty reduction.

5. Speed limits

6. Speed limits should be appropriate to the situation and likelihood of encountering vulnerable road users for example narrow, twisty, rural roads are unlikely to be suitable for a 60 mph limit in populated areas, while a well engineered single carriageway 'A' road may well be.

7. We welcome the proposal regarding rural roads set out in the Department for Transport's consultation: A Safer Way, "revising our existing guidance to highway authorities, recommending that lower limits are adopted where risks are relatively high and there is evidence that a lower limit would reduce casualties" (<http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/roadsafety/roadsafetyconsultation/>).

8. More broadly immediate improvements to road safety can be enjoyed by reducing the default urban speed limit to 20 miles per hour. The evidence in its favour is strong. In Hull, where a 20mph limit has been rolled out in 118 zones over the past 5 years, overall injuries have declined by **60%**. Moreover, child pedestrian injuries have declined by **75%**.

9. 20mph is the speed at which drivers can have eye contact with other users of the street. It is the speed at which pedestrians feel more confident about crossing the road, children play outside their homes and it is quiet enough to hold a conversation.

10. The Commission for Integrated Transport's 2001 study looking at best practice in transport across Europe found that where cities have 20mph limits covering between 65% and 85% of the urban network, they are transformed "from being noisy, polluted places into vibrant, people-centred environments" (<http://www.cfit.gov.uk/factsheets/03/index.htm>).

11. More fundamentally, speeding traffic is among the biggest barriers preventing greater uptake of zero-emission modes of transport such as walking and cycling. Other cities that have adopted area-wide 20mph limits, such as Graz in Austria, have experienced significant modal shifts from motor vehicles to walking and cycling. This also contributes to an overall reduction in CO2 emissions. There are wider environmental benefits too: a default 20 mph speed limit would lead to a smoother flow of traffic, with less braking and acceleration, and would therefore be expected to reduce vehicle emissions on an area-wide basis.

12. In the short-term a demonstration of 20 mph's viability and popularity lies with local authorities setting authority-wide 20 mph limits in built-up areas across the country.

13. Police presence and driver behaviour

14. Although new technology is already contributing to road safety, it is not enough on its own. The use of cameras tends to only catch certain behaviour such as speeding or jumping red lights.

15. Living Streets argues that there needs to be a visible police presence alongside the use of new technology. Research suggests that the minimum distance "halo effect" (the effect of the presence of the police on driver behaviour in the area around where the police are seen) is five times greater than for speed cameras.

16. However, there has been a long-term marginalisation of traffic policing as other priorities have taken precedence. Responses from Living Streets supporters to our request for views put this down to police viewing those committing road safety offences (e.g. driving dangerously) differently to those committing other types of offence (e.g. robbery) even though the impact may be as severe.

17. There should also be an increased focus on driver behaviour, in particular speeding and alcohol misuse. We want to see ambitious

targets for improved driver compliance with speeding and alcohol legislation.

18. A zero tolerance approach to drink-driving should be adopted: a minimal amount of alcohol - even from half a pint of beer - in the blood should become a criminal offence. Random breathalyser tests of motorists should be increased.

19. Street design

20. We welcome the approaches to street design adopted in Manual for Streets and want to see it become more widespread and used across a wider variety of roads (<http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/sustainable/manforstreets/>).

21. Guardrails, street clutter and staggered crossing points have absolutely no place on residential and shopping streets. Designers should establish where pedestrian desire lines lie, and plan spaces to ensure that crossings follow the most convenient and direct routes possible.

22. "Shared space" approaches to highway design, currently more common in countries such as Holland and Germany, increase road safety by encouraging drivers to pay more attention to their surroundings and negotiate priority with other road users on a more conciliatory level.

23. Summary/Recommendations

24. Speed limits should be appropriate to the situation and likelihood of encountering vulnerable road users. For example narrow twisty rural roads are unlikely to be suitable for a 60 mph limit in populated areas, while a well engineered single carriageway A road may well be.

25. A default urban speed limit of 20 miles per hour should be adopted.

26. In the meantime, all authorities should implement authority-wide 20mph default limits in all built-up areas.

27. Our streets must be made as welcoming and open to all users as possible avoiding designing pedestrians out of the environment.

28. A visible police presence is needed as it offers opportunities to improve road safety.

29. A focus on driver behaviour and a zero tolerance approach to drink-driving should be adopted.

30. "Manual for Streets" guidelines should be followed in all urban areas.