



Birmingham City Council 20mph Limits – Mythbusters

Birmingham City Council has endorsed a policy in support of 20mph speed limits in residential areas and other appropriate locations including: those defined as ‘primary shopping frontages’ or ‘secondary shopping frontages’; A and B roads with school entrances or schools; and roads with other local trip attracters such as parks or leisure facilities, health centres and hospitals, and public transport hubs and interchanges.

Implementation will be on a phased basis commencing with a pilot scheme broadly covering approximately one fifth the city by area, comprising the entire city centre within the A4540, plus areas to the east and south of the city centre. This includes all or part of the wards of Aston, Nechells, Ladywood, Moseley and Kings Heath, Brandwood, Springfield, Sparkbrook, South Yardley, Bordesley Green, Washwood Heath and Hodge Hill.

The following seeks to address some of the issues and misconceptions that have emerged throughout the development of this policy and associated consultations.

20mph limits would apply on main roads as well as residential roads

We are proposing that 20mph be the speed limit on residential roads in the city; the main A and B roads would keep their current speed limit. The areas for the pilot scheme have been confirmed, and further detailed local consultation has taken place on exactly which roads would be included.

The vast majority of Birmingham’s roads are residential unclassified roads. These and other minor roads account for 87.4% of the city’s roads **by length of road**. If we include the stretches of A and B roads through local centres, and around schools, leisure facilities, hospitals and public transport interchanges, then this comes to around 90% of the total road length of the city’s roads.

20mph limits won’t make roads safer

Evidence from several towns and cities across England shows that the implementation of 20mph limits reduces the number and severity of road traffic collisions. The Government has recommended that local authorities consider 20mph speed limits in cities based on this evidence.

The severity of injuries sustained in the event of a collision is directly linked to the speed at which vehicles travel. A pedestrian, if struck by a vehicle driving at 20mph, is likely to suffer slight injuries. At 30mph they are likely to be severely hurt and at 40mph or above are likely to be killed.

Reducing the speed limit to 20mph will have a direct impact on pedestrian safety and is one of the principal reasons for introducing the scheme throughout the city. It has also been shown that children living in the most deprived areas are up to five times more likely to be killed as a pedestrian than children living in affluent areas.

Evidence from other schemes includes:



- **Portsmouth** – 20mph limits have lowered casualties in road traffic collisions by a further 8% than may have otherwise occurred;
- **Warrington** – a reduction in collisions of 25% in 20mph speed limit areas;
- **Nottingham** – in the Sherwood area of Nottingham, which has had a full year of 20mph on residential roads, average speeds have decreased by 5.2%. Casualties in road traffic collisions have reduced from an average of 9.4 per year before implementation, to 8 (all slight) in the year following implementation.

20mph speed limits will not make people change their behaviour

The introduction of 20mph speed limits is just one element of a package of measures to reduce vehicle speeds. Reducing the speed limit should not be seen as an end in itself, but as part of a continuous process to encourage a change in driver behaviour and attitude with the aim of establishing 20mph as the default appropriate maximum speed in residential areas.

The implementation of the scheme would be accompanied by a publicity campaign to persuade people of the benefits of driving at 20mph on residential roads. The campaign would be city-wide, whilst concentrating on the areas involved in the first phase.

The Council has ignored the public consultation result

The overall result of the citywide public consultation carried out in Autumn 2013 appears to be against the proposals but this is an oversimplification of the whole picture.

Those who travelled by car as their main mode of travel were over-represented in terms of the consultation responses, and were more likely to be opposed to the proposal. Many of the reasons for not supporting the proposals could be said to be based on misconceptions in terms of where the limits would apply and that they would improve road safety.

There was a clear majority in favour of 20mph limits in some parts of the city, whilst there was opposition in others. There was also strong support for a more targeted approach, for example for 20mph limits around schools.

In general there were significant levels of support from key stakeholders and elected members.

Additionally, in determining the policy position, a range of factors in addition to the consultation results need to be taken into account. These include the growing evidence base to show the road safety and environmental benefits, and the role that 20mph limits can play in the promotion of active travel and healthy lifestyles.

20mph limits are therefore being implemented based on a combination of factors taking into account: the consultation results; a more objective assessment based on road safety data (to include the levels of collisions and the number of collisions involving pedestrian, cycling and children); and complementary schemes and the availability of funding.



More detailed local public consultations on which roads to include have been carried out in the pilot areas. Where practicable we have taken notice of the views of local residents and amended proposals accordingly. In line with the findings of these consultations we are proposing to increase the number of roads that are changing to 20mph from those originally proposed.

20mph limits will increase journey times

20mph will mainly apply on residential streets, and in selected locations on main roads. Most main roads will keep their existing 30mph or 40mph speed limits, so once drivers leave residential areas and join the main road network there should be no impact on journey times. The vast majority of the city's traffic travels on the 10% of the road network that will stay at 30mph or 40mph. The parts of any journey affected would only be the relatively short sections of that journey that would be on 20mph roads in order to reach the main road network.

20mph limits would increase congestion

On a clear stretch of road, travelling at 20mph will obviously take longer than travelling at a higher speed. However, research indicates that at slower speeds, vehicles flow more smoothly through junctions. As such, within an urban environment, 20mph may help to improve traffic flow. In addition, as a result of reduced acceleration and braking, 20mph may help to reduce fuel consumption and associated emissions.

20mph limits will increase noise

Driving at 20mph has been found to reduce traffic noise; the benefit of a signs-only scheme is that drivers can adopt a smoother driving style than if they were driving through a calmed zone with humps. A study in Graz, Austria found that the introduction of 30kph (18mph) signs-only limits led to a noise reduction up to -2.5 decibels. Compared to 30mph, 20mph means 3 decibels less traffic noise. This level of noise reduction means that people can more easily listen to each other and also sleep better. In urban areas with speeds up to 35mph a 6mph reduction cuts noise by up to 40%. (Campaign for Better Transport for the UK Noise Association, 2009).

20mph limits will increase air pollution

Studies have so far not conclusively proven either a positive or negative effect on the environment. The greatest environmental benefit from the change will come from unlocking the potential for walking or cycling short distances instead of driving. Adopting a smoother driving style can also achieve lower emissions. Generally, driving more slowly at a steady pace saves fuel and carbon dioxide emissions, unless an unnecessarily low gear is used (DfT). Along shorter roads with junctions and roundabouts, limiting acceleration up to 20mph reduces fuel consumption (The AA, 2008).

As part of the monitoring process we will be measuring the air quality in the pilot area, before and after implementation, to see if the scheme makes any difference.

20mph will increase journey times for buses

Most bus services travel along roads that will stay at their current speed limit. It is only at the ends of some routes, where the buses go onto residential roads, where the speed limit might be 20mph. Most buses spend very little time travelling at more than 20mph, particularly in residential areas due to the frequency of stops and the need to carefully negotiate obstacles such as parked cars. Even on main bus routes a



recent study found that less than 25% of the time was spent above 30kph (18.5mph) (Passenger Transport Executive Group – Bus Idling and Emissions - <http://tinyurl.com/pteg-idle>). At peak times this proportion is even less.

20mph near hospitals is a bad idea because it will slow down ambulances

All speed limits contain an exemption for vehicles on emergency calls, so ambulances using blue lights could travel as quickly as was safe to do so, based on road conditions, not based on the speed limit.

20mph will increase business costs and make deliveries slower and more expensive

German evidence shows 12% less fuel use by vehicles where slower limits were implemented as driving became smoother (An illustrated guide to traffic calming by Dr Carmen Hass-Klau (1990)). All firms have a supply chain. Rising transport fuel costs affect all energy prices and profit margins. A 12% saving is significant and would help UK firms to compete, survive and thrive, boosting jobs. Also see comments above regarding impact of 20mph limits on journey times.

As part of the monitoring process we will be carrying out research into the views of businesses so that we can continue addressing any concerns they might have. We also have plans to work with businesses on the publicity and education campaigns around 20mph areas, looking at both business operations and benefits to the workforce through promotion of walking and cycling and improved road safety.

20mph limits are anti-car and are just another way of penalising motorists

20mph creates a safer environment for everyone, including motorists. It will not significantly increase journey times and, by easing traffic flow, may actually reduce some journey times.

We are not trying to stop people from driving, but are trying to balance the needs of drivers with the safety and environment of local residents.

This will be a change and it will take some conscious decision making as a driver to make a difference. The change can be compared to anti-drink driving campaigns and the Clunk, Click seatbelt campaign: over time it has become unacceptable to drive while drunk and it is now second nature to put a seatbelt on to drive. It will take some time for 20mph to become second nature.

In reality vehicles are rarely driving at a consistent speed, particularly in a city where there is constant accelerating, decelerating and braking to respond to current traffic speeds, traffic lights or junctions.

Speed enforcement is carried out by the Police, in association with the local authorities. The revenue from any fines goes to central Government funds, and to fund speed awareness courses. None of the money from fines comes back to local authorities.

Pedestrians and cyclists need to be better educated

A city-wide programme of education and publicity around the benefits of lower vehicle speeds in residential areas will accompany the introduction of sign-only 20mph speed limits to redefine motorists' relationship with residential roads, alongside ongoing programmes of road safety education, cycle training and campaigns aimed at pedestrians and cyclists as well as car drivers. Work is well underway to develop



this programme in terms of the best way to get key messages to different audiences. We have already started to promote our 'Slower is Safer' message via a city wide poster campaign and through social media, in advance of any new 20mph limits being introduced.

We are also looking at our existing programmes of road safety education and promotion of walking and cycling to make sure that they are coordinated. The City Council are continuing to work closely with West Midlands Police and the West Midlands Fire Service as part of the Birmingham Road Safety Partnership in the delivery of road safety initiatives.

20mph speed limits won't be enforced

West Midlands Police support the introduction of 20mph speed limits across the city in appropriate locations. Anything that can help to reduce speed will make neighbourhoods quieter and safer to live in. We expect that drivers will comply with the newly introduced speed limits. Where persistent breaches of the speed limit are identified a referral will be made to the local police team who may choose to deploy community speed watch in that area. Officers can also use powers under the Police Reform Act to warn drivers and seize vehicles from persistent offenders. Speed enforcement in the city is targeted at locations where there have been either serious or fatal road accidents. Given the type of the roads that will be subject to the new 20mph we do not anticipate the Police deploying mobile speed cameras to these locations.

There won't be any investment in road safety outside of the pilot area

In addition to the area proposed for the first phase, 20mph speed limits and zones will be considered in other areas of the city through other programmes of work, including local safety schemes and safer routes, subject to local consultations, in accordance with the overall 20mph strategy. Given the potential timescales for completing network coverage, it is proposed that where funding is available this is provided to allow broader policy roll-out at key locations outside of the core zone of implementation such as local centres, schools and hospitals across the wider network. This could be prioritised on road traffic collision rates, similar to safer routes programmes.

There are a number of local centres where there are proposals to implement 20mph ahead of the city-wide roll-out starting next year. These are in line with existing policies. Local residents and business in those areas are being consulted and kept fully informed of plans.

All current sites where a 20mph limit is in force would be reviewed if necessary as part of the wider consultation.