

New Speed Limit Guidance For Councils

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-speed-limit-guidance-for-councils>

The new guidance is to be used for setting speed limits on single and dual carriageway roads in both urban and rural areas.

The objectives of the guidance are:

- to provide up-to-date and consistent advice to traffic authorities
- to improve clarity and therefore greater consistency of approach when setting speed limits across the country
- to enable the setting of more appropriate local speed limits, including lower and higher limits where conditions dictate
- to achieve local speed limits that better reflect the needs of all road users
- to ensure improved quality of life for local communities and a better balance between road safety, accessibility and environmental objectives, especially in rural communities

Local speed limits, written statement by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport, 18 January 2012

On 18.01.13 the DfT published a revised speed limit circular; '[Setting local speed limits \(Department for Transport circular 01/2013\)](#)'. This follows a consultation held last summer (2012), the [report of which is also published today](#). The DfT also published a [speed limit appraisal tool](#). These follow up key commitments from the government's 'Strategic framework for road safety' published in May 2011.

The updated circular gives guidance to local councils which will help them implement more consistent speed limits on local roads. It incorporates recent changes that create more flexibility for authorities to implement 20mph limits and zones. It also sets out the process for applications for further rural 40mph zones.

The speed limit appraisal tool will help councils assess the full costs and benefits of any proposed local speed limit schemes, and help them to make evidence-based decisions to introduce local speed limits that reflect the needs of all road users. As well as casualties and other traffic effects, the DfT have made particular effort to build into the tool effects that cannot be monetised, such as those that enhance quality of life.

The revised circular replaces 'Circular 01/2006', also called 'Setting local speed limits', which is now withdrawn.

[Setting local speed limits: Department for Transport circular 01/2013](#)

Section 1. Introduction.

Speed limits should be evidence-led and self-explaining and seek to reinforce people's assessment of what is a safe speed to travel. They should encourage self-compliance. Speed limits should be seen by drivers as the maximum rather than a target speed.

Traffic authorities set local speed limits in situations where local needs and conditions suggest a speed limit which is lower than the national speed limit.

This guidance is to be used for setting all local speed limits on single and dual carriageway roads in both urban and rural areas.

This guidance should also be used as the basis for assessments of local speed limits, for developing route management strategies and for developing the speed management strategies which can be included in Local Transport Plans.

Traffic authorities are asked to keep their speed limits under review with changing circumstances, and to consider the introduction of more 20 mph limits and zones, over time, in urban areas and built-up village streets that are primarily residential, to ensure greater safety for pedestrians and cyclists, using the criteria in Section 6.

Section 2. Background And Objectives Of The Circular.

Traffic authorities continue to have the flexibility to set local speed limits that are appropriate for the individual road, reflecting local needs and taking account of all local considerations.

Local speed limits should not be set in isolation, but as part of a package with other measures to manage vehicle speeds and improve road safety.

Section 3. The Underlying Principles Of Local Speed Limits.

The Highways Agency is responsible for determining speed limits on the trunk road network. Local traffic authorities are responsible for determining speed limits on the local road network.

It is important that traffic authorities and police forces work closely together in determining, or considering, any changes to speed limits.

The full range of speed management measures should always be considered before a new speed limit is introduced.

The underlying aim should be to achieve a 'safe' distribution of speeds. The key factors that should be taken into account in any decisions on local speed limits are: history of collisions; road geometry and engineering; road function; Composition of road users (including existing and potential levels of vulnerable road users); existing traffic speeds; and road environment.

While these factors need to be considered for all road types, they may be weighted differently in urban or rural areas. The impact on community and environmental outcomes should also be considered.

The minimum length of a speed limit should generally be not less than 600 metres to avoid too many changes of speed limit along the route. This can be reduced to 400 metres for lower speed limits, or even 300 metres on roads with a purely local access function, or where a variable 20 mph limit is introduced.

Speed limits should not be used to attempt to solve the problem of isolated hazards, such as a single road junction or reduced forward visibility, e.g. at a bend.

Section 4. The Legislative Framework.

All speed limits, other than those on restricted roads, should be made by order under Section 84 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.

Any speed limits below 30 mph, other than 20 mph limits or 20 mph zones, require individual consent from the Secretary of State.

Unless an order has been made and the road is signed to the contrary, a 30 mph speed limit applies where there is a system of street lighting furnished by means of lamps (three or more throwing light on the carriageway) placed not more than 200 yards (183 metres) apart.

Traffic authorities have a duty to erect and maintain prescribed speed limit signs on their roads in accordance with the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2002 (TSRGD 2002).

If traffic authorities wish to deviate from what is prescribed in signing regulations, they must first gain the Secretary of State's authorisation.

Traffic authorities are not permitted to erect different speed limit signs relating to different classes of vehicle.

Vehicle-activated signs must not be used as an alternative to standard static signing, but as an additional measure to warn drivers of a potential hazard or to remind them of the speed limit in force.

Section 5. The Speed Limit Appraisal Tool.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/speed-limit-appraisal-tool>

The tool has been designed to;

- forecast mean and 85th percentile speeds for speed limit changes
- forecast changes to: journey times separately for business and personal users; vehicle operating costs including fuel; accidents by severity; CO2 emissions; and NOX emissions; and
- appraise changes in speed limits to 20mph, 30mph, 40mph, 50mph, 60mph and, on dual carriageways, 70mph.

In addition to enabling a local highway authority to decide whether or not to introduce a new speed limit scheme, the tool introduces transparency in the decision making process. It also provides a facility that encourages local highway authorities to adopt a more consistent appraisal process, whilst still allowing the flexibility for the highway authority to take into account local road conditions and the surrounding environment.

The tool deals with those aspects of speed limit changes that can be quantified, such as accidents, journey time savings and CO2 emissions, and those that presently cannot be quantified because of a lack of evidence, such as journey time reliability, model shift and impacts on public anxiety.

Section 6. Urban Speed Limits.

Speed limits in urban areas affect everyone, not only as motorists, but as pedestrians, cyclists and residents. As well as influencing safety they can influence quality of life, the environment and the local economy.

Traffic authorities are encouraged to adopt the Institution of Highways and Transportation's urban safety management guidelines (see IHT, 2003), in which road hierarchies are adopted that reflect a road's function and the mix of traffic that it carries.

Traffic authorities can, over time, introduce 20mph speed limits or zones on: Major streets where there are – or could be - significant numbers of journeys on foot, and/or where pedal cycle movements are an important consideration, and this outweighs the disadvantage of longer journey times for motorised traffic.

This is in addition to residential streets in cities, towns and villages, particularly where the streets are being used by people on foot and on bicycles, there is community support and the characteristics of the street are suitable.

Where they do so, general compliance needs to be achievable without an excessive reliance on enforcement.

20 mph zones require traffic calming measures (e.g. speed humps, chicanes) or repeater speed limit signing and/or roundel road markings at regular intervals, so that no point within a zone is more than 50 m from such a feature. The beginning and end of a zone is indicated by a terminal sign.

20 mph limits are signed with terminal and at least one repeater sign, and do not require traffic calming. 20 mph limits are similar to other local speed limits and normally apply to individual or small numbers of roads but are increasingly being applied to larger areas.

20 mph zones are predominantly used in urban areas, both town centres and residential areas, and in the vicinity of schools. They should also be used around shops, markets, playgrounds and other areas with high pedestrian or cyclist traffic, though they should not include roads where motor vehicle movement is the primary function. It is generally recommended that they are imposed over an area consisting of several roads.

No point within a 20 mph zone must be further than 50 metres from a traffic calming feature (unless in a cul-de-sac less than 80 metres long).

The implementation of 20 mph limits over a larger number of roads, which the previous Speed Limit Circular (01/2006) advised against, should be considered where mean speeds at or below 24 mph are already achieved over a number of roads.

Every English authority has a traffic sign authorisation which permits them to place a 20mph speed roundel road marking as a repeater sign, without the requirement for an upright sign, to reduce unnecessary signing.

Traffic authorities have powers to introduce 20 mph speed limits that apply only at certain times of day. These variable limits may be particularly relevant where for example a school is located on a road that is not suitable for a full-time 20 mph zone or limit, such as a major through road.

The Secretary of State has provided a special authorisation for every English traffic authority to place an advisory part-time 20mph limit sign, with flashing school warning lights. This can be a more cost-effective solution, where appropriate, and reduces the requirement for signing.

Roads suitable for a 40 mph limit are generally higher quality suburban roads or those on the outskirts of urban areas where there is little development. Usually, the movement of motor vehicles is the primary function.

In exceptional circumstances, 50 mph limits can be implemented on special roads and dual carriageways, radial routes or bypasses where the road environment and characteristics allow this speed to be achieved safely.

30 mph is the standard speed limit for urban areas (Section 6.3 1)

Speed limits in urban areas – summary Speed limit (mph)	Where limit should apply
20 (including 20 mph zone)	In streets that are primarily residential and in other town or city streets where pedestrian and cyclist movements are high, such as around schools, shops, markets, playgrounds and other areas, where motor vehicle movement is not the primary function.
30	In other built-up areas (where motor vehicle movement is deemed more important), with development on both sides of the road.
40	On higher quality suburban roads or those on the outskirts of urban areas where there is little development, with few cyclists, pedestrians or equestrians. On roads with good width and layout, parking and waiting restrictions in operation, and buildings set back from the road. On roads that, wherever possible, cater for the needs of non-motorised users through segregation of road space, and have adequate footways and crossing places.
50	On dual carriageway ring or radial routes or bypasses that have become partially built up, with little or no roadside development.

Section 7. Rural Speed Management.

It is government policy that a 30 mph speed limit should be the norm in villages. It may also be appropriate to consider 20 mph zones and limits in built-up village streets.

Speed limits for single carriageway roads with a predominant motor traffic flow function Speed limit (mph)	Where limit should apply:
60	Recommended for most high quality strategic A and B roads with few bends, junctions or accesses.
50	Should be considered for lower quality A and B roads that may have a relatively high number of bends, junctions or accesses. Can also be considered where mean speeds are below 50 mph, so lower limit does not interfere with traffic flow.
40	Should be considered where there are many bends, junctions or accesses, substantial development, a strong environmental or landscape reason, or where there are considerable numbers of vulnerable road users.

For C and Unclassified roads with important access and recreational function, the following speed limits are deemed appropriate and traffic authorities should use these as guidance when reviewing the speed limits on these roads: The national speed limit of 60 mph is only appropriate for the best quality C and Unclassified roads with a mixed (i.e. partial traffic flow) function with few bends, junctions or accesses. In the longer term, these roads should be assessed against through-traffic criteria. For lower quality C and Unclassified roads with a mixed function and high numbers of bends, junctions or accesses 50 mph may be appropriate. A speed limit of 40 mph may be considered for roads with a predominantly local, access or recreational function, for example in national parks or areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONB), or across, or adjacent to, unenclosed common land; or if they form part of a recommended route for vulnerable road users. It may also be appropriate if there is a particular collision problem.