



Birmingham City Council 20mph Limits – Mythbusters

Birmingham City Council is seeking to endorse 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 up to one third of 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, Edgbaston, Harborne, Selly Oak, Bournville, Moseley and Kings Heath, Springfield, Sparkbrook, South Yardley, Bordesley Green, Washwood Heath and Hodge Hill.

The following seeks to address some of the issues and misconceptions that emerged in advance of and during the consultation undertaken in October and November 2013.

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. Once the areas for the pilot scheme have been confirmed, further detailed local consultation would take 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;
- **Bristol** – reported an increase in walking ranging from between 10% and 36% and for cycling between 4% and 37%; a small but significant reduction in average daytime speeds of between 0.9 mph 1.4 mph; and a reduction in accidents.

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 area involved in the first phase.

The Council has ignored the public consultation result

The overall result of the public consultation 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.



It is therefore proposed to initially introduce 20mph limits 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 pedestrian, cycling and child accidents); and complementary schemes and the availability of funding. The exact area is still to be determined and will be subject to detailed local consultation. It is likely to be logically defined by natural geographical boundaries such as the road pattern rather than exactly following ward boundaries.

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 40 mph 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 30 or 40 mph. 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 dB. 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).



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 30km/h (18.5 mph) (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 it 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.

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 Clunk, Click, the 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 we are rarely driving at a consistent speed, particularly in a city where we are constantly 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.

20mph speed limits won't be enforced

It is proposed that the limit would be enforced in the same way as the existing 30mph limits in the city. Signs and lines would be installed to make drivers aware of the 20mph limit. 20mph would be the legal limit on the roads affected and as such should persistent speeding at these locations become an issue, further measures would be considered in order to address this. The devices used by the Police can be used from speeds of 5 mph up to 200 mph.

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, 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.