Streetcare
Engineering Services

Speed Limits
Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee
28th January 2014

QD028

Engineering Services

London Borough of Havering

Streetcare

London Borough of Havering

Engineering Services

Town Hall

Main Road

Romford RM1 3BB

Report Title:

Speed Limits

Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee

28th January 2014

Version: 1

Date: 15th January 2014

Prepared by

Mark Philpotts CEng MICE FCIHT FIHE AIEMA

Principal Engineer

T: 01708 433751

E: mark.philpotts@havering.gov.uk

1.0 Introduction

This paper sets out the background to how speed limits are set in the UK with information as to how this is arranged within the London Borough of Havering. There is also information on the legal framework, traffic signs and 20mph zones and limits. Detailed guidance is contained within the Department for Transport Circular 01/2013 "Setting Local Speed Limits".

2.0 General Principles

The local traffic authority is responsible for setting local speed limits for its roads. In Havering, the London Borough of Havering is the traffic authority for all roads except the M25, A12, A127 and A13. The M25 is known as a "special road" (motorway) and is managed by the Highways Agency on behalf of the Secretary of State for Transport and the other three roads are managed by Transport for London on behalf of the Mayor of London.

There are two default speed limits which apply to borough and TfL roads. The first is 30mph in built up areas where a system of street lighting is present (a "restricted" road) and the second is the National speed limit which applied in all other cases.

If a road is lit, but not subject to a 30mph speed limit, then the posted speed limit will be marked with upright repeater signs, sometimes reinforced with carriageway markings. The National speed limit will still apply for certain classes of vehicle, the drivers of which are expected to be familiar with their own restrictions.

Where an unlit road is not subject to the National speed limit, then the posted speed limit will be marked with upright repeater signs, sometimes reinforced with on carriageway road markings, although again, the National speed limit will still apply for certain classes of vehicle.

The following table gives the National speed limit in different situations with different classes of vehicle;

Vehicle Type	Single carriageways mph (kph)	Dual carriageways mph (kph)
Cars and vehicles (including dual-purpose vehicles and car-derived vans up to 2 tonnes max laden weight)	60 (96)	70 (112)
Cars towing caravans or trailers (including car-derived vans and motorcycles)	50 (80)	60 (96)
Motor homes or motor caravans (not more than 3.05 tonnes maximum unladen weight)	60 (96)	70 (112)
Motor homes or motor caravans (more than 3.05 tonnes maximum unladen weight)	50 (80)	60 (96)
Buses, coaches and minibuses (not more than 12 metres overall length)	50 (80)	60 (96)
Goods vehicles (not more than 7.5 tonnes maximum laden weight)	50 (80)	60 (96)
Goods vehicles (more than 7.5 tonnes maximum laden weight)	40 (64)	50 (80)

Variable speed limits operate on some parts of the motorway network (designated with overhead variable message signage). They are used where conditions create an increased safety risk (poor visibility, congestion etc) and the speed limit is accordingly reduced. The overhead variable message signage is provided at regular intervals so that it is clear when the lower limit applies and the areas where this system is in operation is monitored by CCTV.

Other than a special case with 20mph speed limits (see later), variable speed limits are not permitted elsewhere. There has been public debate about speed limits being raised at night or in situations where traffic conditions are quieter and less people are likely to be present on the street.

Such an arrangement would need primary legislation to change the default “restricted road” speed which would change at a certain time of the day, and/or the use variable message signs. A speed limit change at a set time of the day would present problems in terms of enforcement (such as guaranteeing drivers having access to the correct time) and would not easily take daylight changes into account between summer and winter. Perhaps more seriously, there is the potential for some drivers to take less care where a higher limit is in force in linking an expected reduction in street activity with the higher limit. Variable message signs create a higher level of maintenance burden than static signs.

In general terms, speed limits should be evidence-led and self explaining; seeking to reinforce people’s assessment of what is a safe speed to travel. This is not the same as people driving to the limit of their personal ability and speed limits should be seen by drivers as a maximum rather than a target speed.

Road geometry, frontage condition and interaction with other highway users are key variables in the evidence base used to set speed limits, as is collision history and risk in changing existing limits. Community concern is increasingly being brought to bear in decision making on speed limit reductions.

At one end of the scale, motorways and trunk roads are generally subject to the National speed limit as junctions are grade separated (by slip roads), there is no frontage activity, vulnerable road users are not permitted (motorways) and geometric changes are gradual. These routes provide a completely “movement” (of traffic) function. In some areas where motorways and trunk roads enter urban areas and where the variables change more quickly, lower limits will apply. An example in Havering is the A12 which is subject to the National speed limit in Essex, but it reduces to 50mph as it becomes a TfL road as there are side roads, traffic signalled junctions, frontage activity and indeed pedestrians and people on bikes. This approach also applies to construction of new roads where those mainly for movement will be designed accordingly. In terms of limiting direction access, geometric changes being gradual and so on.

At the other end of the scale, a constrained residential area with schools, shops and community facilities, tight geometry, high levels of vulnerable user activity (especially pedestrians and people on bikes) and frontage activity (shops, homes etc) will attract a low speed limit. In fact, many traffic authorities have decided that 30mph is too high in these places and 20mph limits are becoming the norm which has been the case internationally for some time. These areas tend to have a much higher “place” function and people are being increasingly prioritised over through traffic. For example the London Borough of Islington has imposed 20mph zones and limits across its entire networks (other than TfL roads) in an effort to reduce casualties and make their roads feel safer and more people (and therefore place) oriented.

The most successful schemes will examine side road networks and seek to close routes to non-local through traffic (“rat-running”). This approach maintains important and necessary vehicular access to residents, visitors and deliveries, but enhances actual and perceived safety for those walking and cycling within the area, as well as reducing the other impacts of through traffic such as noise and local pollution. In these situations, reliance on physical measures to reduce speeds will be diminished. There is a risk that excluded traffic makes the main road network more heavily used, but there is international evidence to suggest that some people no longer make short vehicular journeys and so in the long term, congestion is not increased.

Areas such as high streets which are also through routes provide both movement and place functions and so there will be demands from different users. There is a move in many parts of the UK to put place above movement (at high speeds) in order to help regenerate high street situations. The most well known local example is Hornchurch High Street which has maintained its movement function, but has also sought to increase priority for people moving between the various shopping parades and so the street environment has been changed to support the introduction of a 20mph zone.

3.0 Basic Legal Framework

The Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, as amended (the Act), provides the legal framework for speed limits, their setting and their changing.

The 30mph speed limit for a restricted road is set by Section 81 of the Act. Section 82 defines which streets are restricted by default as follows;

"in England and Wales, there is provided on it a system of street lighting furnished by means of lamps placed not more than 200 yards apart"

This section also allows a traffic authority to decide which roads will be designated as a restricted road. When the Council adopts a new road, it will generally be lit and therefore on adoption, the road will be restricted by default. Section 84 of the Act provides powers for a traffic authority to permanently change speed limits using a Traffic Order.

Section 86 of the Act deals with speed limits for different classes of vehicle (as in the table earlier) and Section 87 provides an exemption for emergency services vehicles where observing the speed limit would hinder the use of a vehicle attending to an emergency (which is a judgement issue for the driver in the circumstances at the time, rather than a blanket exemption).

Where it is proposed to change a speed limit, a traffic authority is required to consult a number of organisations and other organisations representing persons likely to be affected. This is contained within The Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996. The basic statutory requirements also require a notice explaining the proposal to be published in a local newspaper, notices placed on site and letters or notices delivered to those potentially affected. The traffic authority must also place proposals on deposit for public inspection. In practice, the Council maintains a standard list of consultee organisations which satisfies the requirements of the Regulations as well as consulting local residents and businesses as appropriate. Proposals will be generally held in the Public Advice & Contact Centre or available from Streetcare.

Anyone may object to a Traffic Order in writing and the traffic authority must consider objections before making a decision whether or not to implement the order. The traffic authority has no legal requirement to consider comments of support. In practice, the Council comes to a decision via the Highways Advisory Committee process which makes a recommendation to the Cabinet Member for Community Empowerment. The approval for a change in speed limit will then be made with an Executive Decision, which is published on Calendar Brief and subject to call in.

Once a decision is made to implement a speed limit (in common with Traffic Orders more generally), the Order is "made" and "sealed". In other words, notices are published to the effect that the decision has been made and a date for the speed limit coming into force is given. The Order is a physical document which caries the seal of the Council and is signed by the Mayor and authorised officer (normally Head of Law). An example of a sealed traffic order is appended to this document.

Speed limits are only enforceable if the correct traffic signs are placed and enforcement is undertaken by the police. Enforcement policy generally follows the guidance set out in the Association of Chief Police Officers' document "ACPO Speed Enforcement Policy Guidelines 2011 – 2015: Joining Forces for Safer Roads, May 2013". The Council has no powers relating to the enforcement of speed limits.

4.0 Traffic Signs

The form and design of traffic signs is prescribed by the Traffic Signs Regulations & General Directions 2002 as amended. The Council is required to sign speed limits in accordance with the Regulations and any departure requires special authorisation from the Department for Transport (which is highly unlikely for signs related to speed limits).

The place where a speed limit changes is known as the "terminal point" which can either be at a position along the length of a road (a "link"), or at the entrance to a side road. The signs used to indicate a change of speed limit are known as "terminal signs". Where a road is lit, terminal signs placed on a link must also be lit. Where

terminal signs are placed at the entrance to a side road, they do not need to be lit, but visible to turning drivers.

Repeater signs are required where the speed limit is above 30mph in a lit area, or where a 30mph limit is in place within an unlit area. 20mph zones and limits have their own rules. The size of terminal signs and repeaters are also prescribed by the regulations depending on the conditions.

5.0 20mph Zones & Speed Limits

There are two types of 20mph speed limit which have subtle differences in arrangement. There are over 2000 20mph schemes in England with the majority being zones.

20mph zones require traffic calming measures (such as, but not limited to, speed humps, chicanes etc) or repeater speed limit signing roundel road markings, so that no point within a zone is more than 50 metres from such a feature. The start and end of a zone will be indicated by appropriate terminal signs.

20mph limits have terminal signs and repeater signs and do not require traffic calming. Limits are generally only effective where traffic speeds are already low. In both cases, the arrangements rely on speeds already being low or the road layout being changed to make the limit self-enforcing. Low speed is generally defined as a situation where mean traffic speed is measured at 24mph or below.

There is provision within legislation for the introduction of variable 20mph speed limits that only apply at certain times of day. For example, such an arrangement might be useful where a school is situated on a major through road where a full time 20mph speed limit would not be suitable. The principle, like with motorways, is a reduction from the normal limit because of conditions. In order to indicate a variable 20mph limit, variable message signing would be required which has a more onerous maintenance liability than static signs. Part-time advisory 20mph speed limits are also possible, but not enforceable.

6.0 Speed Limits in Havering

There are a variety of speed limits in force within Havering. Within the borough's urban areas, roads are generally restricted and therefore subject to the 30mph speed limit. The presence of street lighting indicates this limit and therefore the only traffic signs road users will see are those when travelling from a higher or lower limit into a 30mph limit (the terminal point).

Requests are often made for "repeater" signs or road markings within a street subject to a 30mph speed limit. This is specifically forbidden in the legislation covering traffic signs, unless it is at the terminal point. If the street is not lit, but subject to a 30mph limit, then repeaters are required. There are two exemptions. One is on Vehicle Activated Signs which are permitted to display a 30mph sign within a restricted road. The other is where speed camera signs are placed by the police; the speed limit is permitted to be shown as a repeater on the same sign.

Havering currently has 23 20mph zones (but no "limits") which cover over 200 streets (or parts of streets). Many of the zones were originally established in areas around schools as part of the former "safer routes to school" programme. There are also zones established as a result of injury collisions within groups of streets which would not have attracted funding individually for casualty-reduction works. Where new developments are concerned, developers are being encouraged to design road layouts to promote low speeds and where possible (and through the statutory processes) 20 mph zones are being established.

There are a limited number of speed limits higher than 30mph in urban areas within the borough, but the higher speed limits tend to be in the rural parts of the borough with some set at 40mph, some at 50mph and the rest subject to the National speed limit.