

SETTING LOCAL SPEED LIMITS

Report By: Director of Regeneration and Director of Environment and Culture

Wards Affected

County-wide

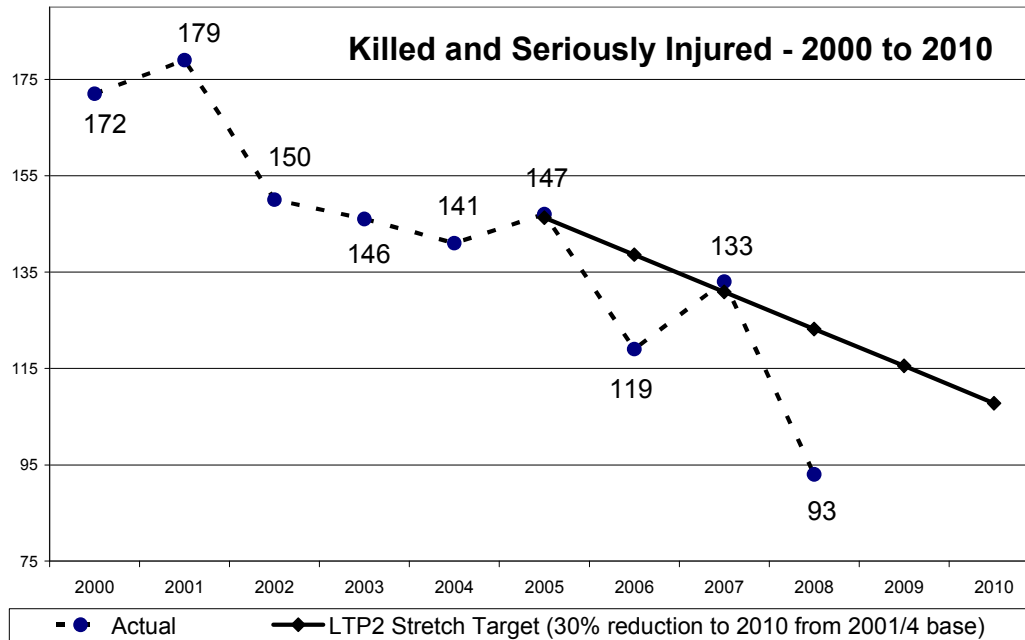
Purpose

1. To inform the Committee on the Council's approach to considering and changing local speed limits and provide an update on how the Council is planning to implement the guidance set out in Circular 1/2006 'Setting Local Speed Limits'.

Background

The Road Safety Strategy

1. The Council's approach to setting local speed limits is part of a wider Speed Management Strategy which forms a key component of our Road Safety Strategy set out in the Local Transport Plan. The Speed Management Strategy works alongside a Minor Safety Improvements Programme and the Road Safety Education Programme.
2. The overall objective of the Road Safety Strategy, and a key Local Transport Plan indicator and Local Area Agreement indicator (National Indicator 47), is to reduce road traffic casualties and in particular the most serious casualties (referred to as killed or seriously injured – KSIs). We are well on track to achieve the challenging target for reducing KSIs by 30% from a base of 154 (the 2001 to 2004 average) by 2010. The chart below sets out the KSIs for the current LTP period. The KSI figure for 2008, 93 is the lowest ever recorded in the County and provides confidence that our Strategy is working.



3. The Speed Management Strategy includes the Speed Limit Policy (which is the subject of this report), Traffic Calming policy, Vehicle Activated Signs policy and enforcement of speed limits through the Safer Roads Partnership (formerly the Safety Camera Partnership).

The Current Approach to Setting Local Speed Limits

4. Speed plays a significant role in road traffic accidents – research has shown that a 1mph reduction in average speed reduces accident frequency by 5% (Finch et al 1993, Taylor et al 2000). Our Speed Limit Policy is included in the Local Transport Plan and is also attached to this report.
5. The policy seeks to ensure that speed limits are appropriate for the road and contribute to improving road safety. Experience shows that by the introduction of a speed limit may not automatically result with the reduction in vehicle speeds desired by residents, parish councils etc. However when introduced in accord with criteria, significant results are obtained.
6. Requests for the consideration of any speed limit are investigated against criteria within the policy with respect to:-
- Identification of terminal points at a location where a driver will see change of character of the road and adjust their speed accordingly, together with ensuring a minimum length of 600m is achievable to enable safe enforcement activities.
 - Establish an access rate per kilometre, indicating the density of development and associated hazards.
 - Collision statistics.
 - Existing vehicles speeds as assessed by the 85thile speed (the speed at which 85 percent of drivers travel at or below).

7. Subject to meeting the above criteria, requests are then processed in line with the our Traffic Regulation Order protocol (attached) and can take up to 310 working days to process. In the three years up to December 2008 approximately 50 speed limits have been either introduced or reduced across the County.

Key Elements of Circular 1/2006 'Setting Local Speed Limits'

8. Government has long recognised the need for a consistent approach for reviewing and setting local speed limits, ensuring that best practice and consistency are inherent in the approaches to setting local speed limits across all highway authorities. The Circular draws on a wide range of research and provides clear advice and recommendations for highway authorities to move towards more consistent approaches to setting speed limits.
9. The Circular acknowledges that speed limits must have regard to the following factors:
 - a. Road function;
 - b. Road geometry;
 - c. Road environment;
 - d. Level of adjacent development; and
 - e. Traffic composition
10. The most significant elements of the Circular relate to:
 - a. Use of 'mean' speeds rather than 85th percentile to help determine limits
 - b. Confirmation of the appropriate minimum length of a speed limit
 - c. A 'higher' and 'lower' tier hierarchy for rural roads
 - d. Speed assessment framework
 - e. 30mph speed limits should be the norm in villages
 - f. The need to review A and B class roads and implement any necessary changes in line with the guidance by 2011.

Use of 'Mean' Speeds to Determine Limits

11. Previous guidance placed an emphasis on the observed 85th percentile speed as an indication of the appropriate limit for the road. The Circular marks a shift away from this to consideration of the 'mean' speed. The 85th percentile would typically provide a slightly higher speed than the mean, however, the two would normally have a close relationship. Where they don't (and where there is a wide spread of speeds) it would indicate that there is confusion in drivers' minds about the appropriate speed for the road. This would indicate a need to consider engineering measures, in addition to setting the speed limit, to help reduce confusion.

Appropriate Minimum Length of Speed Limits

12. The Circular also confirms that the minimum length for a speed limit should be 600 metres and this could be reduced in exceptional circumstances to 400 and 300 metres. The terminal points of the limit should take account of local features which would help clarify the change in environment. The Circular is clear that speed limits should not be used to address isolated hazards such as a single road junction.

Upper and Lower Tier Roads

13. The Circular provides advice on an approach to categorising the rural road network into high and lower tiers. The attached table provides a summary of the hierarchy and the corresponding speed limits recommended by Government. In summary, the Circular suggests that:
 - a. Upper tier – typically A and B roads with primary purpose to provide for through traffic
 - b. Lower tier – typically C and unclassified roads with a local access function

Speed Assessment Framework

14. Included as an appendix to the Circular is a suggested assessment framework which provides a consistent tool for highway authorities to assess and set local speed limits. The Framework takes into account
 - a. the level of development/accesses,
 - b. level of usage by vulnerable road users,
 - c. the upper and lower tier categories referred to above,
 - d. accident rates on the routes, and
 - e. the observed mean speeds.
15. The new framework differs from our existing policy in that it identifies the type of road, with recommended limits within those tiers, also existing vehicle speeds are to be assessed by the mean, rather than the 85%ile value.

Village Speed Limits

16. The Circular states that the introduction of 30mph limits for villages is Government policy. It sets out clear guidance on the criteria which should be met:
 - a. There should be 20 or more houses on one or both sides of the road – if there are fewer allowance could also be made for additional buildings such as churches, schools or a village shop,
 - b. The section of road which the village extends over should be at least 600 metres. This length may be shortened to 400 or even 300 metres if the density of development exceeds 20 houses but the guidance is cautious on this relaxation.
17. Currently whilst our policy within the Local Transport Plan supports the introduction of 30 mph limits in villages, this is subject to the criteria being met.

Review of A and B Roads by 2011

18. The Circular states that one of Governments' priorities for action is for highway authorities to review the speed limits on all of their A and B class roads and implement any necessary changes in accordance with the Circular and its guidance by 2011. The Circular does acknowledge that the focus of attention should take into account roads or routes (not just A or N roads) with the most pressing problems of collisions and injuries or where there is widespread disregard for current speed limits.
19. This review will provide the opportunity to review the Counties major highway network against the desires of the Circular, but may not result with a 'blanket' 50 mph limit across the County. It will, however, confirm that the speed limits on our network are appropriate for the tier of road, helping to reduce collisions and severity of injuries.
20. There has been recent press coverage about the Department for Transport considering a reduction of the 'National' speed limit to 50 mph. As far as can be established there are no firm proposals, or ongoing consultations, with regards to this, however, authorities who have undertaken reviews of limits base upon Circular 1/2006 have raised concerns over the intrusion, cost of installation and maintenance of signage when a 50 mph limit is deemed to be the appropriate limit on rural roads.

The Council's Proposed Response to the Circular and Programme for Review

21. The Council are committed to improving safety upon our highway network, thus the current policies and criteria will be revised and adopted to meet the desires of Circular 1/2006.
22. This will allow for the commencement of the review of 'A' and 'B' class roads which will be included within the terms of reference and service definitions of the service delivery MAC, a priority list of roads to be assessed being approved by the end of August 2009, followed by the start of the review with a programmed date of completion in accord with the approved list, but no later than December 2011.

RECOMMENDATION

That the contents of this report are noted.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Herefordshire Local Transport Plan 2: Annex 5 Speed Limit Policy
- DfT Circular 1/2006 'Setting Local Speed Limits' Appendix D Speed Limits for Single Carriageway Roads in Rural Areas
- Highways Services Traffic Order Making Protocol (separate file)

Herefordshire Local Transport Plan 2

2006/7 to 2010/11

Technical Annex 5

Speed Limit Policy

Herefordshire Council Speed Limit Policy

How To Determine Whether A Speed Limit Should Be Introduced And At What Speed It Should Be Set.

- Determine the locations where the speed limit will start.

A speed limit must commence where there is a change in the character of the road; speed limits have to be self-enforcing to a certain degree in order for the limit to be effective.

If drivers can see a reason for a limit, it will generally be adhered to, i.e. if they are entering a built up area.
- Determine the length of the proposed limit.

The minimum length of a limit is just under half a mile (600m).

If the length of the speed limit is too short, this can result in the danger of drivers entering the area and ignoring the speed limit.

Too short a length may also cause difficulty with enforcement by the Police.
- Establish the access rate per kilometre over the requested length.

This is seen to take into account the likely level of perceived risk of conflict on the highway.

No. of accesses per kilometre	Initial limit
Less than 10	National
10 – 15	50 mph

15 - 20	40 mph
More than 20	30 mph

- Once the initial limit has been determined, it is necessary to examine whether the limit needs to be adjusted.

Adjust the limit down by 10 mph if the accident rate exceeds 1 per million veh-km.

Adjust the rate up by 10 mph if the road is a dual carriageway.

- The last stage is to compare the resultant limit with the observed 85%ile speeds.
If the 85%ile speeds are less than the limit, then no speed limit is needed.
If a speed limit is implemented higher than the recorded 85%ile speeds, then this can result in the 85%ile speeds rising to that of the limit.
If 85%ile speeds exceed the limit by more than 10 mph then additional speed reducing measures are needed.
The requirement for any additional speed reducing measures will need to be discussed with the Police and a source of funding will need to be identified before proceeding.
In all other cases the speed limit can be introduced using standard signing.

APPENDIX D:
SPEED LIMITS FOR SINGLE CARRIAGEWAY
ROADS IN RURAL AREAS*

Table 2: Speed limits for single carriageway roads in public areas		
Speed limit (mph)	Upper tier – roads with predominant traffic flow function	Lower tier – roads with important access and recreational function
60	<p>Recommended for most high quality strategic A and B roads with few bends, junctions or accesses.</p> <p>When the assessment framework is being used, the accident rate should be below a threshold of 35 injury accidents per 100 million vehicle kilometres with this speed limit.</p>	<p>Recommended only for the best quality C and Unclassified roads with a mixed (i.e. partial traffic flow) function with few bends, junctions or accesses.</p> <p>In the longer term, these roads should be assessed against upper tier criteria.</p>
50	<p>Should be considered for lower quality A and B roads which may have a relatively high number of bends, junctions or accesses.</p> <p>When the assessment framework is being used, the accident rates should be above a threshold of 35 injury accidents per 100 million vehicle kilometres at higher speeds.</p> <p>Can also be considered where mean speeds are below 50 mph, so lower limit does not interfere with traffic flow.</p>	<p>Should be considered for lower quality C and Unclassified roads with a mixed function where there are a relatively high number of bends, junctions or accesses.</p> <p>When the assessment framework is being used, the accident rate should be below a threshold of 60 injury accidents per 100 million vehicle kilometres.</p>
40	<p>Should be considered where there is a high number of bends, junctions or accesses, substantial development, where there is a strong environmental or landscape reason, or where there are considerable numbers of vulnerable road users.</p>	<p>Should be considered for roads with a predominantly local, access or recreational function, or if it forms part of a recommended route for vulnerable road users.</p> <p>When the assessment framework is being used, the accident rate should be above a threshold of 60 injury accidents per 100 million vehicle kilometres.</p>
30	Should be the norm in villages.	

**Recommended speed limits to which traffic authorities are encouraged to move over a period of time, subject to their meeting local needs and considerations.*

