

Consultation Response to Welsh Government 20mph Proposals

September 2021

About Living Streets Cymru

We are Living Streets Cymru, part of the UK charity for everyday walking.

We want to create a nation where walking is the natural choice for everyday, local journeys; free from congested roads and pollution, reducing the risk of preventable illnesses and social isolation. We want to achieve a better walking environment and to inspire people of all generations to enjoy the benefits the simple act of walking brings.

For over 90 years we've been a beacon for walking. In our early days our campaigning led to the UK's first zebra crossings and speed limits. Now our campaigns and local projects deliver real change to overcome barriers to walking and our groundbreaking initiatives such as the world's biggest Walk to School campaign encourage millions of people to walk.

As we are responding as an organisation, our response will only broadly follow the set questions.

The clear message from our members is that there is a need for a reduction in speed limits to 20mph in the roads where people live and work. The issues raised under Question 2 are all valid concerns that we hear about on a regular basis right across Wales and were evident in the feedback we received from our Members and Supporters which is summarised later in this document.

There is strong evidence that tackling both traffic volume and speed around schools are effective at improving the walk to school: in New South Wales, Australia, a comprehensive school street safety programme focused on reducing traffic speeds and volumes showed a 46% reduction in school-aged pedestrian casualties (NSW Audit Office, 2010). This specifically addresses the concerns of many families about speeding traffic, which, according to a survey commissioned by Living Streets, is cited by 60% of parents as a concern on their walk to school (OnePoll, 2016).

Reducing traffic speeds on streets where people live, work, play, study or shop will benefit all of the opportunities listed under question 6. Backed up by the evidence, Public Health Wales has adopted the position that not only will lowering the default speed limit to 20mph (from 30mph) save lives and reduce injuries, there are also likely to be benefits in terms of reduced noise and safer and more cohesive communities that are more pleasant to live in. People are also likely to be encouraged to walk or cycle more. They note that evidence suggests the potential for a wide range of public health benefits and few, if any, negative effectsⁱ.

Under question 7, people who respond that they are either strongly or slightly against the move to 20mph are offered a list of reasons as to why they may be against it. Living Streets disagrees with all of these possible reasons as we are not aware of any evidence base to support them. We know, for example, that the majority of pedestrian fatalities occur in built up areas and that the chance of a collision is greatly increased with higher traffic speed. Not only that, but the chance of survival goes down as speeds go upⁱⁱ.

The evidence from Public Health Wales demonstrates the social benefits that 20mph will bring. Safer streets where it is safer to cross the road, there are more people out walking on the street and communities are brought closer together will bring huge benefits for older people, people with a physical or sensory impairment and pregnant women. Indeed, the improved air quality that comes from reducing braking and accelerating in 20mph areas can significantly improve the life chances of an unborn childⁱⁱⁱ.

With businesses facing unprecedented pressures to remain viable, it is essential that we look properly at what makes our high streets pleasant places to be. Our evidence shows that more walking-friendly retail areas lead to increased footfall and increased spend^{iv}. Public Health Wales agree in their Position Statement that 20mph improves business viability.

Lower speeds increase road capacities, as the bunching effect at junctions is reduced as traffic flow improves. That's why urban motorways are often 40 or 50mph, as opposed to 70mph. Even an urban journey of three miles, taking 30 minutes in a 30mph limit, was shown to only increase to 33 minutes in a 20mph setting.

What our Living Streets Survey Shows

Living Streets ran an online action over August and September to encourage people in Wales to participate in this 20mph consultation. We asked them why they supported a move to 20mph and over 340 individuals took the time to leave us a comment before they went on to complete the Welsh Government consultation exercise. These comments are summarized below.

Safety

Overwhelmingly, comments in favour of a move to a default of 20mph related to improving the safety of our streets leading to fewer accidents and, most importantly, fewer deaths. Of major concern are the safety of vulnerable members of the community including children, older people, partially sighted and wheelchair users.

“As a supporter of walking instead of driving where possible, 20mph limit protects pedestrians much more than 30mph.” Bethan O, Denbighshire.

“As a pedestrian and cyclist as well as a motorist I am sure that this move will make our city streets safer. we have allowed cars to totally dominate urban spaces to the degree that we are now terrified to allow our children outside less they be harmed. our streets need to provide freedom for everybody not just the privileged motorist.” Paul B, Cardiff.

Reduced air and noise pollution

The comments were also full of remarks about reduced pollution with regard to both air quality and noise. An increasing number of people are also now making a link between lower speeds and reduced fuel consumption.

“Our narrow streets were never meant for modern vehicles, and our newer roads are now too busy. Reducing the speed limit will definitely prevent accidents and also reduce noise pollution, both of which are huge problems.” Christine T, Carmarthen.

Quality of life

The quality of life in an area where people live also came through strongly in the responses we received. There is a sense of reclaiming the streets and creating more people-friendly neighbourhoods through reduced traffic speeds.

“It makes a better quality of life for people, it allows children to play more safely and it puts the balance back towards people rather than cars. It also reduces carbon emissions.” Owain LI, Powys.

“Time to recognise that cars shouldn’t dictate the environment we live in nor the safety we deserve!” Frank B, Monmouthshire.

It was most concerning to see people all over Wales describe their streets as ‘race-tracks’. Introducing 20mph in residential streets is seen as a way to create a better sense of community, as ‘nicer places to live’. An interesting point to have appeared, dotted throughout the comments, is the safeguarding of small animals, or pets, as well as protecting the lives of pedestrians and cyclists.

“Because I am sick to death of hearing all the boy racers racing past my house at all hours of the day - it's just a matter of time before an accident happens!” Kevin W, Rhondda

“I have an autistic daughter with no road awareness and I'm always scared because cars come racing round blind corners far too fast where we live.” Jem J, Monmouthshire

“People seem to think that all roads are race tracks. hopefully this will help protect old people, children, pets and wild life.” Sue T, Carmarthen.

More walking and cycling

Encouragement of active travel is another key issue that many respondents raised. People being more inclined to walk and cycle as a result of reduced speed limits, resulting in an even better sense of community, was described by one respondent as a ‘virtuous circle’.

“I think this will make a massive difference particularly for vulnerable adults and for children. It'll encourage more people to walk and cycle, as people will feel there's less likelihood of death and serious injury and car drivers will realise that it's just as quick to walk and cycle rather than driving for short distances. It will also improve the whole feel of residential streets, so that they are more orientated towards people and not cars, so improving social cohesion and neighbourliness.” Caroline C, Swansea.

Rural Roads

There were a significant number of comments around rural roads. People who live in more rural settlements often raise the issue of the lack of footways outside their front doors, which when coupled with high-speed traffic – create a particularly hostile environment. With nowhere to walk safely, there were several calls for further reductions in speed limits, for example, 10-15 mph where there are no pavements

“20mph should absolutely be the default maximum speed limit on residential streets. To be honest, on any street that lacks pavements (like many of the narrow streets in Llanberis and across Wales) it should be 10mph.” Neal H, Gwynedd.

Enforcement

A notably frequent comment to come through the survey was the concern that the new speed limit would not be enforced. There is certainly a common perception that speed limits are not adequately enforced across Wales. It is our view that public communications on the proposed changes make it very clear what the position is on enforcement.

“I strongly support a 20mph limit on residential streets, with the additional comment that the speed limits must be enforced” Jan T, Cardiff.

Perhaps this comment best summarises the responses we received

*“Less accidents, less stress, save lives and lower emissions. Win, win, win, win.”
Julie G, Barry.*

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[https://www2.nphs.wales.nhs.uk/PHWPapersDocs.nsf/public/58D5E8244E8C2A1E8025830F0045DC7A/\\$file/8.3.270918%20-%20App%201%20Position%20Statement%20-%2020mph.pdf](https://www2.nphs.wales.nhs.uk/PHWPapersDocs.nsf/public/58D5E8244E8C2A1E8025830F0045DC7A/$file/8.3.270918%20-%20App%201%20Position%20Statement%20-%2020mph.pdf)

ii <https://www.rospa.com/media/documents/road-safety/20mph-zones-and-speed-limits-factsheet.pdf>

iii <https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/heart-matters-magazine/news/air-pollution>

iv <https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/policy-and-resources/our-policy/high-streets>