



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

**20mph**

# Misinformation Fact sheet





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## Background.

On 17th September 2023, a 20mph speed limit for drivers will come into force on 'restricted roads' across Wales. 'Restricted' roads have street lights placed no more than 200 yards apart. They are usually located in residential and built-up areas with high pedestrian activity. There is a notable difference between the characteristics of a 20mph speed limit and a 20mph zone. 20mph limits are areas where the speed limit has been reduced to 20mph, but there are no physical measures to reduce vehicle speeds within the area. In contrast, 20mph zones use traffic calming measures to make the zones self-enforcing.

## Fact Sheet Guide.

The Misinformation Factsheet below aims to prevent the spread of mis and disinformation by providing an evidence-based analysis of common myths surrounding the introduction of default 20mph speed limits in Wales. This document will be circulated to Local Authorities, stakeholders, partners, and the Media to help proactively counter false or unsubstantiated claims made about the policy.

## Myth-busting.

### **"20 mph will be the speed limit on all roads that are currently 30mph"**

#### **Analysis: Spin (missing context)**

This claim ignores the fact that councils will have control over ensuring that the speed limits are implemented in a way that works for their local context.

#### **The legislation will change the default speed limit on restricted roads to 20mph, however highway authorities can set a higher speed limit of 30mph.**

'Restricted' roads have street lights placed no more than 200 yards apart. These roads are usually located in residential and built-up areas with high pedestrian activity. Currently, 30mph is the default speed limit for these roads, with any other speed limits signed. The new legislation will make the default speed limit on these roads 20mph.

Local authorities – and the two trunk road agents<sup>1</sup> who know their roads best and are best placed to engage with local communities – will decide which roads should remain at 30mph, applying Welsh Government Guidance to help them in the process. Welsh Government has published a map on [DataMapWales](#) that shows which roads would stay at 30mph. These are the exceptions to the default 20mph speed limit (for more details about the exceptions process, please see the [Welsh Government website](#)). This map is updated as local information becomes available.

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<sup>1</sup> The Welsh Government is responsible for trunk roads and motorways. Two public sector organisations deliver Wales' maintenance and improvement plans: North and Mid Wales Trunk Road Agent (Gwynedd Council) South Wales Trunk Road Agent (Neath Port Talbot CBC).

**“There will be no enforcement of the 20mph limits.”**

**Analysis: False**

This claim jumps to conclusions about enforcement without evidence.

**GoSafe and Welsh police forces fully support the new national 20mph speed limit and will be carrying out enforcement, as they do now for all speed limits.**

A combination of mobile enforcement vehicles and fixed cameras will be used to make roads safer for all users. Community Speed Watch groups, Welsh Fire and Rescue Services, and local policing teams, will also continue seeking opportunities to provide roadside education for drivers who are exceeding the speed limit.

**“Reducing the speed limit adversely impacts traffic flow.”**

**Analysis: Unsubstantiated**

This claim misrepresents the existing evidence.

**Reducing the speed limit could actually improve traffic flow.**

The introduction of 20mph limits aims to promote safer environments for walking and cycling (which could lead to a decrease in the number of vehicles driving on the road), potentially making traffic flow more smoothly. In addition, driving consistently at a slower speed rather than accelerating or decelerating from higher speeds, could improve traffic flow.

As well as this, evidence<sup>2</sup> from Transport for Wales' first interim Monitoring and Evaluation report shows that 20mph limits have minimal impact on journey times (more information under 'Myth: The 20mph limit will greatly increase my journey time').

**“The 20mph policy is expensive to implement. The money could be better spent on other policies”**

**Analysis: Spin (missing context)**

This claim cherry picks the impacts and costs of the policy, without giving the full picture.

**The 20mph policy is a cost-effective intervention which saves lives, and could save up to £92 million a year.**

The evidence suggests introducing 20mph limits is a cost-effective intervention. In 2001, a trial in Scotland of 20mph speed limits at 78 sites found reductions in speed and casualties, with death and serious injuries declining from 20% to 14%. The report concluded that such limits offer a low

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<sup>2</sup> Transport for Wales (TFW), *Default 20mph speed limit on restricted roads Phase 1 Interim monitoring report*, (2022).



cost option for promoting road safety.<sup>3</sup> More recently in South Central Edinburgh, the 20mph limit pilot evaluation found that depending on the scale of implementation, 20mph limits could be introduced at 1/6th of the cost of traditional 20mph zones.<sup>4</sup>

The Welsh Government does not plan to include traffic calming measures (including speed bumps) – which can typically be a costly measure – as part of the change to speed limits. The policy aims to reduce noise and emissions from vehicles by enabling a steady flow of traffic avoiding the acceleration and deceleration which comes with more physical traffic calming measures. A recent public health study estimated that the 20mph default speed limit could result in 6 to 10 lives being saved, as well as 1200 to 2000 casualties avoided, each year. The value of preventing these casualties is estimated at around £92m each year<sup>5</sup>.

### “Reducing speeds to 20mph will damage my car.”

#### **Analysis: Unsubstantiated**

Modern vehicles have been designed to drive at lower speeds without damaging the engine or components. Accelerating up to a reduced speed of 20mph, and driving at a more consistent speed, should result in lower tyre and brake abrasion, and also help prolong engine and gearbox life<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, 20mph and 30km/h (18.5mph) urban speed limits have been applied for over two decades throughout Europe.

### “Driving at 20mph uses more fuel.”

#### **Analysis: Spin (missing context)**

This claim misrepresents the existing evidence.

#### **Fuel consumption is influenced by many factors, particularly by the way we drive.**

Fuel consumption is mainly influenced by the way we drive, driving at a consistent speed is better than stopping and starting. Accelerating up to 30mph can take twice as much energy as accelerating to 20mph. In a 2017 study by NICE<sup>7</sup> on air pollution, it was found that ‘ensuring motorists drive steadily at the optimum speed can help reduce stop-go driving and so improve fuel consumption.’

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<sup>3</sup> Burns, A., Johnstone, N., Macdonald, N., *20mph Speed Reduction Initiative*, (Scottish Executive Central Research Unit, Edinburgh, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Davis, A., “*The state of the evidence on 20mph speed limits with regards to road safety, active travel and air pollution impacts*”, *A Literature Review of the Evidence*, (2018).

<sup>5</sup> Jones, Sarah J, *Twenty miles per hour speed limits: a sustainable solution to public health problems in Wales*, 2017

<sup>6</sup> Explanatory Memorandum to the Restricted Roads (20 mph Speed Limit) (Wales) Order 2022

<<https://senedd.wales/media/fo3ibze5/sub-ld15187-em-e.pdf>> [accessed 15 February 2023]

<sup>7</sup> National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), “Air pollution: Outdoor air quality and health”, *NICE guideline [NG70]*, (2017).

**“The 20mph limit will greatly increase my journey time.”**

**Analysis: False**

This claim misrepresents the existing evidence.

**Changing from 30mph to 20mph on restricted roads has been shown not to have a significant impact on average journey times.**

A recent early monitoring report from the eight first settlement areas introducing a default 20mph in Wales found that there was a minimal impact on journey times.<sup>8</sup> This can be explained by the fact that overall point-to-point speeds in most urban areas are determined by delays at junctions and signals rather than the speed limit on the sections of roads between them. For the majority of the day, it is rare for vehicles in towns and cities to reach 30mph for more than one or two minutes before they are slowed by queuing vehicles or red signals.<sup>9</sup>

**“The introduction of a 20mph limit is anti-car.”**

**Analysis: Spin**

This claim creates a false division.

**The introduction of a 20mph limit makes roads safer for all road users and will save lives.**

The introduction of 20mph aims to make the roads safer for all road users with potential benefits to car users. These include smoother traffic flow (due to less stop-start driving), shorter journey times (from fewer vehicles on the road as a result of enabling more people to safely walk or cycle), and a decrease in collisions by encouraging safer driving habits.

The speed limits in the Road Traffic Regulations and the Highway Code apply to all motor vehicles. While these do not apply to bicycles, the Highway Code clearly states that cyclists should be considerate of other road users.

We do, at the same time, want to make streets safer for playing, walking and cycling, and to encourage more people to make more sustainable travel choices.

**“The introduction of a 20mph limit will create more pollution.”**

**Analysis: Unsubstantiated**

This claim jumps to conclusions about the knock on effects of the policy and misrepresents the existing evidence.

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<sup>8</sup> Transport for Wales (TFW), Default 20mph speed limit on restricted roads Phase 1 Interim monitoring report, (2022).

<sup>9</sup> “Welsh 20mph Task Force Group - Welsh Government”

<<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-07/20mph-task-force-group-report.pdf>> [accessed 3 February 2023]



**There are many factors that increase pollution, and the evidence suggests that 20mph is not one of them.**

A study by Imperial College<sup>10</sup> found that 20mph limited areas were “pollution neutral”. Many things contribute to pollution levels. These include:

- driving style
- acceleration
- braking
- vehicle condition
- distance travelled
- engine temperature

Additionally, encouraging more people to choose active ways of travelling will, in turn, result in fewer polluting cars on the roads.

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<sup>10</sup> Imperial College London - Centre for Transport Studies, “An evaluation of the estimated impacts on vehicle emissions of a 20mph speed restriction in central London” (2013)  
<<https://www.bristol20mph.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/speed-restriction-air-quality-report-2013-for-web.pdf>>  
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