



**OFFICER REPORT TO LOCAL COMMITTEE  
(WOKING)**

**SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**

**20mph SPEED LIMIT POLICY**

**20 FEBRUARY 2008**

**SUMMARY**

The Local Committee asked for this item to be presented at the next available Local Committee meeting to obtain a better understanding of the County Council's Policy to 20mph speed limits. The attached information is as it appears on the County Council's website.

**This is an Information Item.**

## 1 IMPACT OF GUIDANCE ON LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN 2 THEMES

- **Accessibility:** Improved walking and cycling conditions through 20mph speeds.
- **Congestion:** None.
- **Environment:** Made less intimidating thorough 20mph speeds.
- **Road Safety:** Improved through 20mph speeds.
- **Maintenance:** Costs increased if road tables required.

1.1 In 2001, Surrey's first Local Transport Plan (LTP1) stated that 'the streets around schools will generally be made 20mph zones'. Although Surrey's latest Local Transport Plan (LTP2 - 2006) makes no reference to 20mph zones in relation to travel to school, they continue to be of interest. In a wider context, in May 2006, the County Council resolved 'to extend the implementation of 20mph zones to a greater number of local residential streets'.

## 2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Department for Transport (DfT) publication 'Travelling to School: A Good Practice Guide' advises... 'we would like all transport authorities to consider the case for 20mph zones around schools, although we recognise that whether or not to introduce such zones must remain a local decision'.
- 2.2 In August 2006, DfT published Circular 1/06 'Setting local speed limits'. The main implication for speeds outside schools in the Circular was the recommended relaxation of the speed criterion for 20mph limits. Government guidance in 1999 advocated that 20mph speed limits should not be introduced if average speeds were greater than 20mph but Circular 01/06 recommends 24mph.
- 2.3 The consequence of such a relaxation would be that speeds would increase with 15% of traffic travelling at 28mph or more, devaluing the 20mph speed limit. All existing 20mph zones / limits need to be self-enforcing but with speeds in excess of 28mph, additional enforcement would be needed to make them effective. Therefore, the existing county council policy speed criterion in relation to 20mph zones and limits has been retained i.e. average speeds should be 20mph or less (see below).
- 2.4 The purpose of this note is to examine the relevance of speed control outside schools and provides good practice guidance as to the use of 20mph zones and limits.

### **3 THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A 20MPH SPEED LIMIT AND A 20MPH ZONE**

- 3.1 A 20mph **zone** works through the introduction of engineering measures designed to slow drivers, and is supported by signing. A 20mph **speed limit** involves signing without other supporting measures.

### **4 SCC'S CURRENT 20MPH POLICY**

- 4.1 Unlike other limits, '20mph' is associated with effective self-enforcement and drivers do not expect to have the choice of whether to obey the speed limit (or not). In order to sustain this understanding it is important that drivers continue to appreciate that '20 means 20' and Surrey County Councils current policy reflects this.
- 4.2 A 20mph speed limit (or zone) can only be introduced when average speeds are 20mph or less (or have been reduced to 20mph or less through traffic calming). However, if speeds are already so low, any additional road safety benefit from introducing 20mph speed limit signing is unlikely. Similarly, if traffic calming is introduced and succeeds in reducing average speeds to 20mph or less, then the necessity to formalise a 20mph zone could also be questioned.
- 4.3 The important road safety benefit of a traffic calming scheme is that the speed reduction effect is self-enforcing, irrespective of whether it is a formal 20mph zone.

### **5 OUTSIDE SCHOOLS**

- 5.1 The benefits of encouraging pupils to walk and cycle to school (Smarter Travel) are well documented in terms of health and physical fitness within the Safe Routes to Schools initiative, whilst road safety professionals seek to improve safety through working with schools on education and training.
- 5.2 One of the main issues is the environment along the route to school and in particular immediately outside the school gates. This is where, for a short time particularly in the morning, there is vehicle congestion, short-term parking mixing with other rush hour traffic and pupils crossing. This situation exists at many schools but in most cases, excessive vehicle speed is not the main problem. The apparent chaos reduces the possibility of speeding and solutions to improve safety are more likely to involve improved visibility and crossing facilities.
- 5.3 If speeds are below 20mph during the school peaks, then publicising speed measurements and dialogue with the school and the community about more appropriate solutions to the issues is the recommended approach.

### **6 VARIABLE SPEED LIMITS**

- 6.1 In the 1990s the government initiated a national 'variable speed limit' (VSL) trial whereby 20mph speed limits came into operation outside

schools but only during identified school peak periods. The trials (including one carried out at St Johns School, Pendleton Rd, Redhill) showed that such speed limits alone have little if any speed reduction effect, and as a result, the DfT will approve no further VSLs. The selection of the trial school in Surrey involved assessing many locations and highlighted that congestion keeps vehicle speeds down outside most schools during school peaks.

- 6.2 This is not to say that there are no schools where vehicle speed is a problem during the school peaks. However, given their experience with VSLs, it is still a bit surprising that government now asks local authorities to consider introducing 20mph zones around schools.

## **7 MEASURES TO REDUCE SPEEDS**

- 7.1 In Surrey, where schemes are introduced to reduce speeds to 20mph or less, the standard traffic calming feature is generally the kerb to kerb flat top road 'table', constructed in black asphalt. Involving extensive consultation, the scheme development process is outlined fully in SCC's [traffic calming policy](#). Tables provide effective speed reduction throughout the whole day not just during school peaks.
- 7.2 It is important to note that non-physical measures such as Vehicle Activated Signing (VAS), coloured surfacing and / or other signing in isolation, do not meet the legal definition of 'traffic calming works' necessary for the introduction of a 20mph zone.
- 7.3 The good practice guidance below has been developed to clarify the situation in the light of the available information on the subject. It is based upon the principle that the solution should be appropriate to the identified problem.

## **8 GOOD PRACTICE**

- 8.1 Where there is an identified speeding problem (average speeds greater than 20mph) outside a school during the school peaks, consider the merits of introducing a road table scheme (possibly incorporating a 20mph zone).
- 8.2 A 20mph limit (signing only) in such circumstances will have minimal speed reduction effect and is not recommended.
- 8.3 Where average speeds during school peaks are not greater than 20mph then introducing a 20mph zone (or limit) is unlikely to provide significant safety benefit.
- 8.4.1 Identifying the precise nature of a problem outside schools is the key to finding the best solution. Excessive or inappropriate speed may not be the main problem. Dependent upon the circumstances, difficulties may be overcome by improving visibility, providing crossings, repairing or widening the footway, together with involving pupils, parents and the school community.

## 9 MONITORING

- 9.1 Speed measurement will determine the nature of any necessary action. Children injured walking or cycling within 50m of the school gate in the school term represent only 0.1% of all casualties in Surrey (2004), and schemes are most likely to be promoted with a view to encouraging cycling and walking to school whilst improving perceptions of safety. Appropriate monitoring might be a survey of pupils and parents views together with some evidence of (hopefully) increased levels of walking and cycling.

## 10 REFERENCES

- The Department for Transport (DfT) publication 'Travelling to School: A Good Practice Guide'
- 20mph speed limits and zones (Traffic Advisory Leaflet 9/99 DfT)
- TA22/82 Vehicle speed measurement on all-purpose roads (1981, Highways Agency)
- Setting Local Speed Limits (DfT) Circular 1/06
- Information owner: Clive Batchelor
- Last updated: 11/01/2008

**LEAD OFFICER:** Paul Fishwick  
**TELEPHONE NUMBER:** 08456 009 009  
**E-MAIL:** Paul.fishwick@surreycc.gov.uk  
**CONTACT OFFICER:** Paul Fishwick  
**TELEPHONE NUMBER:** 08456 009 009  
**E-MAIL:** Paul.fishwick@surreycc.gov.uk  
**BACKGROUND PAPERS:** See References above

Version No. 1      Date: 4/2/08 Time: 11.00      Initials: PMF      No of annexes: 0