

Transport Committee

20 Mph Speed Limits - note of visit to Portsmouth, 18 November 2008

Present:

London Assembly

- Jenny Jones AM, Rapporteur on 20 mph speed limits
- Caroline Pidgeon AM, Deputy Chair of the Committee
- Tim Steer, Scrutiny Manager
- Richard Berry, Assistant Scrutiny Manager
- Ian Wingrove, Press Liaison Officer, Green Group
- Denys Robinson, Research and Support Officer, Liberal Democrats Group
- Dale Langford, Committee Administrator

Portsmouth City Council

- Councillor Lynne Stagg, Cabinet Member for Traffic and Transportation
- Simon Moon, Traffic and Road Safety Manager
- Angela Gill, Traffic Safety Team Leader
- Margaret O'Neill, Transport and Street Management
- John Billard, Communications and Media

Introduction

1. Jenny Jones AM gave a brief introduction, explaining the role of the London Assembly in holding the Mayor to account and its evidence-based scrutiny process. She explained the background to the investigation.
2. Angela Gill gave a presentation covering the process that led to Portsmouth's introduction of 20 mph speed limits the city. She explained that the idea for the city-wide 20 mph speed limit had initially come from officers, but then had cross-party support from councillors. The City had started introducing 20 mph zones in the 1990s. There was a five-year programme covering two new areas of Portsmouth each year. The programme cost £2 million and each zone cost up to £250,000 to implement.
3. As there was a random pattern of accident locations throughout the residential areas, with few clusters, Portsmouth Council considered a move away from the programme towards the 20 mph limit, and using signs at entry points and repeater signs instead of physical measures to reduce speeds. The success of work on safer routes to schools also helped to demonstrate how such a scheme could benefit the city.
4. Section 84 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act was amended in 1999 to remove the requirement for the Secretary of State to give consent for 20 mph zones, so this allowed the City Council to proceed without needing a Government decision. It was seen as very important to keep the city accessible but safe, so a network of distributor roads with a 30 mph limit were left in place.

5. Other factors influencing the decision included Portsmouth's unique island location, with just three strategic entry and exit routes on the road network and very densely populated residential areas, 90 per cent in narrow terraced streets (most between 5 and 7.5 metres wide) with few back gardens, meaning that children often played in the street.
6. The process leading to the 20 mph limit included consultation with the police and identification and earmarking of sectors of the city for funding over a two-year period. In accordance with Department for Transport recommendations, Portsmouth had to monitor the existing speeds on roads.¹ Nearly all roads within the 20mph default area met the DfT criteria that 85% of traffic travelled at 24mph or less

Consultation process

7. Consultation was a big part of the process, with the involvement of neighbourhood forums and residents' associations, statutory advertisements in the *Portsmouth News*, leaflets, website, television and radio announcements, and posters in schools, community centres and libraries. In addition, every schoolchild in the city was given a leaflet to take home.
8. Initial coverage in the press was negative; the *Portsmouth News* accused the council of turning Portsmouth into a 'tortoise town'. The Council corrected the newspaper's misapprehension (that the 20 mph limit would cover distributor roads as well) and subsequent reporting was very favourable, with a later headline of "Dream of 20mph city is just weeks away".
9. There had initially been a general lack of support from Hampshire Constabulary, as the Association of Chief Police Officers' guidance was believed to not allow for enforcement of 20 mph limits. The police's focus was on regulating speed with speed cameras and an expectation that 20 mph limits were self-enforcing. Much of the contact with the police was via Hampshire's Safer Roads Partnership, covering four different highway authorities with very different needs.
10. There had recently been a shift in police attitudes and following discussions between the Council the police had agreed to undertake active enforcement. The Roads Policing Unit had used a mobile speed camera to monitor one area within the 20 mph limit. Of those stopped for speeding four elected to pay the fine and accept penalty points and thirty elected to undertake driver awareness training. In addition one driver was found to have no insurance. It was not clear whether the change in police attitude had resulted from the Leader of Portsmouth City Council's threat to withdraw from the Safer Roads Partnership. However, it did illustrate that the police can make a decision based upon local factors, as well as ACPO guidance.
11. A lot of the initial comments received were on the likely cost and how it was going to be enforced. The only negative response to the consultation exercise was one person who had contested the City Council's powers to change the speed limit, and who continues to maintain that the limit is illegal.

¹ Department for Transport Circular 1/93 advised that before setting a speed limit an authority should consider a desirable limit and then measure the speed of existing traffic on those roads. If the 85th percentile of speed was within 7mph or 20% of the desired speed then the speed limit was appropriate. If the 85th percentile was outside then the desired speed limit should be raised or the road layout altered to reduce speeds.

Implementation

12. The cost for the programme has been £500,000, considerably less than the £2 million budget for the original 20 mph zone scheme covering 10 small parts of the city. There were 20 mph signs on entering and a minimum amount of repeater signs. A number of additional signs were being installed to satisfy police concerns.
13. As a result of three fatalities on Queen Street, a distributor road in the city centre, there was public pressure for that road to have a 20 mph limit, which the road now has.
14. The last sector was completed in March 2008. A further traffic regulation order was being drawn up to address any anomalies, including requests for roads not previously included.
15. The programme was accompanied by a positive campaign about cycling, walking and other healthy methods of travel. Portsmouth had some statistics on travel by cycle and agreed to pass them on. A programme of turning roads into one-way streets always included, where they were wide enough, a contra-flow cycle lane.

Results

16. The scheme has resulted in a reduction of traffic speeds on almost all the roads covered by the limit. Emerging data showed around a 3mph reduction in average speeds. There were half a dozen residential roads where there remained concerns about speeds of around 26 to 27 mph. Physical features, such as speed humps, would be considered on such roads if necessary.
17. The Council had not set targets for accident reduction, as the focus had been on changing attitudes to speeding. Until all of Portsmouth had experienced at least 12 months of the 20 mph limit, the council was reluctant to assess what effect the limit had had on road casualties or modal shift. It was however confident that the intended shift in attitudes towards traffic speed had been achieved and the Council had a vision that speeding on residential roads could become as unacceptable as drink driving. It was considered possible that a rise in slight injuries might result from increased use of residential streets by pedestrians and cyclists arising from the 20 mph limit, although severe injuries would be reduced.
18. One officer from Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service was working in each of the highway authorities (Hampshire, Southampton, Portsmouth and Isle of Wight) for one year to share expertise in road safety issues, which the Council considered to be a very positive experience.
19. The Council had been involved in a recent IPSOS-Mori public opinion poll by 33 local authorities and scored second highest on traffic and transportation.
20. The Council would be very keen to work with the Department for Transport to do more in-depth research into the impact of the 20 mph limit across the City, as there was not sufficient funding to do that locally.
21. Jenny Jones AM and Caroline Pidgeon AM expressed thanks to Councillor Stagg and the officers of Portsmouth City Council for a helpful and informative visit.