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PUBLICATION

Setting exceptions to the 20mph default speed limit for restricted roads

How highway authorities can set exceptions to 20mph speed limits on restricted roads in Wales.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Status

1.1.1 This Welsh Government guidance document is an Addendum to Circular No: 24/2009, **Setting Local Speed Limits in Wales (SLSLW)** (<https://gov.wales/setting-local-speed-limits>).

1.1.2 This guidance is intended for local interpretation by highway authorities to make evidence-based decisions on setting exceptions to the default speed limit of 20mph on restricted roads in Wales, which will come into force on 17 September 2023.

1.1.3 This Guidance provides a methodology to ensure a consistent approach to exceptions across Wales is taken; yet allowing for local factors and circumstances to be taken into account.

1.1.4 It is to be used as a basis to demonstrate reasoning for making any exception from the default 20mph limit for restricted roads so that the speed limit remains at 30mph.

1.1.5 Restricted roads are defined by section 82 (1) (a) of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 as roads with a system of street lighting furnished with lamps not more than 200 yards apart. Most restricted roads are in built-up areas.

1.1.6 Guidance in SLSLW which deals with speed limits on restricted roads and 20mph limits and zones is superseded by this circular. A new version of SLSLW is currently being prepared to reflect the change in the default speed limit for restricted roads. When the updated SLSLW guidance is published

(towards the end of 2022) it will supersede this addendum to circular no: 24/2009.

1.2 Policy

1.2.1 The Senedd has approved legislation to lower the default national speed limit on restricted roads from 30mph to 20mph to reduce the number and severity of collisions and casualties, to enable more people to use active travel, to reduce environmental impacts and to improve people's quality of life in communities across Wales.

1.2.2 This legislation supports the objectives set out in **Llwybr Newydd: The Wales Transport Strategy 2021** (<https://gov.wales/llwybr-newydd-wales-transport-strategy-2021>), which prioritises walking and cycling above all other modes of travel; and Future Wales, the national development framework which sets the aim for people to live in places where travel has a low environmental impact.

1.2.3 In making this change Welsh Government is aspiring to meet the aims of Article 11 of the United Nations' Stockholm Declaration which states:

“ Reiterating our strong commitment to achieving global goals by 2030 and emphasizing our shared responsibility, we hereby resolve to [...]

“ Focus on speed management, including the strengthening of law enforcement to prevent speeding and mandate a maximum road travel speed of 30km/h in areas where vulnerable road users and vehicles mix in a frequent and planned manner, except where strong evidence exists that higher speeds are safe, noting that efforts to reduce speed in general will have a beneficial impact on air quality and climate change as well as being vital to reduce road traffic deaths and injuries.”

1.3 Legislation

The Restricted Roads (20mph Speed Limit) (Wales) Order 2022

1.3.1 The Restricted Roads (20mph Speed Limit) (Wales) Order 2022 was made by Welsh Ministers on 13 July 2022 following a resolution of Senedd Cymru to approve a draft of the Order.

1.3.2 The Order reduces the general speed limit for restricted roads, set by section 81(1) of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, to 20mph.

1.3.3 It will come into force on 17 September 2023. From that date any restricted road will have a speed limit of 20mph unless a different speed limit is set by the highway authority by Order.

The Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2016

1.3.4 Changes to the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions are in the course of preparation and will follow in 2023.

1.3.5 These changes will remove the requirement for and the ability of highway authorities to place repeater signs on roads with street lighting where the speed limit is 20mph. Highway authorities will have a saving period of 6 months after the coming into force date to take down 20mph repeater signs.

1.3.6 Repeater signs will normally be required on lit 30mph roads. Guidance on the provision of repeater signs is given in the **Traffic Signs Manual: Chapter 3** (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/traffic-signs-manual>).

2. Exceptions to the default 20mph limit for restricted roads

2.1 Principles

2.1.1 In line with the Welsh Government's aspiration to meet the Stockholm declaration (Para 1.2.3), a 20mph speed limit should be set where pedestrians and/or cyclists and motor vehicles mix in a frequent manner, except where strong evidence exists that higher speeds are safe.

2.1.2 Not all existing 30mph roads will meet this test, and highway authorities should prepare Orders to retain the current speed limit for these roads. These are termed 'exceptions' to the default speed limit for restricted roads.

2.1.3 Two principal questions, A and B below, should be considered by highway authorities when deciding whether a 30mph exception should be made:

Question A: Are there significant numbers (or potential numbers, if speeds were lower) of pedestrians and cyclists travelling along or across the road?

- If the answer to A is 'no' then an exception for a 30mph speed limit may be appropriate.

Question B: If the answer to A is 'yes', are the pedestrians and cyclists mixing with motor traffic?

- If the answer to B is 'no' then a 30mph speed limit exception may be

appropriate.

- If the answer to B is 'yes' then a 20mph speed limit will be appropriate unless the robust and evidenced application of local factors indicates otherwise.

2.2.1 Decisions on exceptions should not be influenced by existing traffic speeds.

2.2.2 In view of Llwybr Newydd: Wales Transport Strategy, the fact that a section of road is on a bus route is not in itself a justification for making an exception.

2.2 Process for setting exceptions

Consider existing 30mph roads only

2.2.3 To reduce the scale of the task, highway authorities should generally consider only existing restricted roads when deciding whether to make exceptions, prior to 17 September 2023. Roads that have been made 30mph by Order can also be considered at this stage, if the highway authority consider it appropriate. This will include where extensive lengths of lit roads have been made 30mph by Order.

2.2.4 All existing 20mph roads, whether zones or limits, which have been made by Order should retain their existing speed limit. Where roads are lit these existing 20mph Orders should be revoked, unless roads in the area generally have their limits set by Order.

2.2.5 Speed limits of 40mph and above should not generally be changed at this stage, but their limits may need to be reviewed after 17 September 2023 and following the publication of the revised SLSLW guidance.

Road classification

2.2.6 Most exceptions are expected to be made on A and B classified roads. These generally form the main routes carrying traffic through urban areas.

2.2.7 C class and unclassified roads typically carry mostly local traffic and serve only residential properties. They are usually important routes for people walking and cycling, and will be sharing the carriageway with motor vehicles. It is expected that exceptions should therefore not normally be made for such roads, but authorities may choose to do so, based on this guidance and taking into account local factors.

Place criteria

2.2.8 The following 'Place' criteria have been developed to guide highway authorities to determine, in a consistent way across Wales, which sections of roads may have significant demands for people walking and cycling:

1. Within a 100m walk of any educational setting (e.g. primary, secondary, further education and higher education)
2. Within 100m walk of any community centre
3. Within 100m walk of any hospital
4. Where the number of residential and/or retail premises fronting a road exceeds 20 properties per km.

2.2.9 Sections of road which meet any of these Place criteria should be considered to positively answer principal question A as set out above in 2.1.3.

2.2.10 However, highway authorities continue to have the flexibility to set local speed limits that are right for individual roads, reflecting local needs and considerations.

2.2.11 Where their decision deviates from this guidance highway authorities should have a clear and reasoned case.

Applying local factors to the place criteria

2.2.12 Highway authorities can apply relevant local factors when interpreting the Place Criteria to determine the need for exceptions.

2.2.13 Examples as to how this may be done are provided below. These are purely illustrative to demonstrate how evidence-based local decisions could be made.

2.2.14 **Local facilities:** Local facilities such as community centres or medical facilities may be located on the road in question, but people may access them on foot and cycle via a different route entirely. They may cross the road via a subway or bridge and so not have to encounter motor traffic. In such cases the highway authority may consider place criteria 1 to 3 are not met.

2.2.15 **Residential and retail:** Residential and retail premises may be one side of the road, but if there is open land on the other side of the road, it could mean there is little need for pedestrians and cyclists to cross the road. The properties may not be accessed on foot or cycle directly from the road – people may use a separate service road for example. In such circumstances the local authority may consider Criterion 4 is not met, although the needs of cyclists travelling along the road will still need to be considered, in line with the **Active Travel Act guidance (ATAG)** (<https://gov.wales/active-travel-act-guidance>), published by the Welsh Government in July 2021.

2.2.16 Conversely there may be sections of road where there are significant demands, or potential demands, for walking and cycling which do not meet any of the place criteria, but where a 20mph speed limit may be appropriate, such as:

- land on either side of the carriageway is open parkland and/or sports fields in regular use by people on foot and/or cycle
- regularly used accesses to schools or hospitals are along the road, even though this may be more than 100m from their main entrances
- there is a designated active travel route on the carriageway
- where the number and/or type of collisions occurring along the road means that the road users and the local community would gain significant road safety and other benefits from a speed limit of 20mph.

2.2.17 Attention is drawn to para 2.2.21 regarding the minimum length of speed limits.

Protected facilities for pedestrians and cyclists

2.2.18 Exceptions may be appropriate where there is significant demand (or potential demand) for walking and cycling so long as the highway authority is satisfied that the answer to Principal Question B is 'no' (see 2.1.3) – i.e. that people on foot and cycle are not required to mix with motor traffic.

2.2.19 This would require protected facilities to be provided for pedestrians and cyclists which meet the ATAG, in particular:

- there are footways in accordance with Section 9.6 of the ATAG on the side(s) of the road fronted by development or to provide necessary connectivity.
- any demand for pedestrian and cycle crossing movements mainly takes place at defined locations, which are provided with facilities in accordance with Section 12.3 of the ATAG; or alternatively there is no requirement for people on foot or cycle to cross the road (e.g. development is only on one side).
- cycle provision along the route is 'suitable for most people', based on Table 11.1 of the ATAG. This will usually require physical protection from motor

traffic.

Minimum lengths of speed limits

2.2.20 Where applying this guidance would result in short sections of 30mph speed limits, no exception should be made.

2.2.21 SLSLW recommends the minimum length of a speed limit, in exceptional circumstances, should be 300m on roads with a local access function.

Part time speed limits

2.2.22 Where a highway authority considers that an exception is appropriate at some times but not at others it may derestrict the road and set a part time speed limit by Order.

2.2.23 Variable message terminal signs will be required at the start and end of the section of road. Depending on its length it may also be necessary to erect variable repeater signs, which would show blank faces during the periods when a 20mph speed limit applies.

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