

Report for Information

Report to Norwich Highways Agency Committee
15 September 2011

Report of Head of city development services

Subject Government advice on speed management in residential areas

Item
8

Purpose

To inform members of the latest government advice on speed management in residential areas

Recommendations

Members are recommended to:

- (1) note the report;
- (2) ask the head of city development services' planned future report on a strategy for speed management in the city to take account of any Department for Transport's revised guidance on speed management in urban areas.

Financial Consequences

There are no direct financial consequences of this report.

Strategic Priority and Outcome/Service Priorities

The report helps to meet the strategic priority "Strong and prosperous city – working to improve quality of life for residents, visitors and those who work in the city now and in the future".

Contact Officers

Joanne Deverick, Transportation & Network Manager 01603 212461

Background Documents

None.

Report

Background

1. At your last meeting members requested a report be presented to the committee giving an update on the latest government advice on speed management in residential areas.
2. In June the Department for Transport (DfT) issued a press release announcing changes to the requirements for introducing 20mph speed limits and zones. These changes include;
 - Allowing repeater signs to be used in 20mph zones, and accepting repeater signs as traffic calming features
 - Allowing roundels to be painted on the road instead of repeater signs
 - Making the introduction of variable speed limits easier and cheaper
 - Allowing the use of advisory 20mph speed limits
 - Allowing councils to apply for an authority wide authorisation for variable speed limits rather than site specific authorisations
3. The full text of the press release is attached as appendix 1.

Implications for Norwich

4. Members will be aware that trials have been carried out on signed only 20mph speed limits in residential areas in Norwich, and that a city wide rollout of that scheme was put on hold pending publication of DfT advice on the use of 20mph speed limits.
5. The latest announcements from government do not give any direct advice on when 20mph limits should be used, concentrating on how they are implemented. The requirements that 20mph zones should be self enforcing and that 20mph speed limits are most suited to streets where the average speeds are below 24mph still exist.
6. The strategic road safety framework that was published by the DfT in May announced plans to revise and reissue the DfT guidance on speed limits in urban areas with the aim of increasing flexibility for local authorities¹. They are also planning to produce a toolkit to enable local authorities to judge the cost benefits of speed management schemes. No timescale on when that guidance might be issued was given
7. In terms of the changes announced to how 20mph limits can be implemented, the impact on any area wide 20mph speed limit in residential areas in Norwich is considered to be minimal. There were no plans to include physical measures such as speed humps and chicanes or to use variable speed limits, nor was there a need for DfT authorisation.

¹ The Environment, Transport and Development overview and scrutiny panel will receive a report on the framework at its meeting on 14 September 2011.

8. The use of roundels rather than repeater signs may make the 20mph restriction more visible, but it would not be the add to the cost of implementing the scheme. This is because in Norwich all repeater signs would have been attached to existing street furniture (lamp columns, other signs etc). The cost of providing a sign in those circumstances is a third of the cost of painting a roundel on the carriageway. Also the whole-life cost of a roundel would be significantly higher as it would require periodic repainting.
9. The use of variable speed limits is something that has been trialled in the county, but none have yet been introduced in the city. It is suggested that the planned review of speed management in the city takes accounts of the new guidance and consider whether there are sites in the city where variable or advisory speed limits could be used.

APPENDIX A – DfT Press release

Ministers cut traffic signs red tape for local councils

Publisher: Department for Transport

Published date: 9 June 2011

Type: Press release

Mode/topic: Roads, Traffic signs

Measures to reduce time-consuming and costly bureaucracy for councils wanting to use 20 mph schemes were announced today by Regional and Local Transport Minister Norman Baker.

Today's changes - the first to be announced as part of the Traffic Signs Policy Review - will mean that councils can use signs painted on roads as an alternative to expensive upright signs, cutting street clutter as well as costs.

In addition, the Government will reduce the need for councils to use speed humps in 20 mph zones and make it cheaper and easier for councils to put in place variable speed limits outside schools when local residents want these schemes.

Norman Baker said:

"I want to end the era of top-down government by providing a radical devolution of power to local authorities and communities.

"If councils and local communities want to put in place 20 mph schemes on residential roads or use common-sense measures such as variable speed limits outside schools, then they should be able to do so without spending time and money satisfying unnecessary Whitehall diktats.

"These changes will reduce costs for councils wanting to use 20 mph schemes, allowing them to act faster in response to the needs of their local residents while still ensuring that drivers know what speed they should drive at."

The changes include:

- Expanding the list of specified traffic calming measures allowable in 20 mph zones to include repeater signs and mini-roundabouts. This would allow zones to be introduced with fewer road humps or chicanes where appropriate;
- Allowing local authorities to use speed limit symbols painted on roads more often as repeater signs in 20 mph zones and limits. Upright signs will still be required to indicate the start and end of 20 mph schemes.
- Allowing local authorities to place signs at the entry and exit of variable speed limits - e.g. outside schools - on only one side of the road rather than on both sides of the road as is currently the case;
- Allowing the use of either flashing warning lights or specified flashing lights with a static sign at the entry to variable speed limits which are cheaper for councils to buy;
- Allowing the use of a sign design for advisory 20 mph limits using flashing school warning lights.

- Councils will now be able to request council-wide authorisations for these measures to be used in 20 mph schemes on residential roads where cost-benefit analysis has shown that such schemes would be worthwhile. This will mean that councils can apply these measures without getting approval from Government in each case.

It remains the decision of local councils to decide whether or not to use 20 mph schemes following robust cost-benefit analysis of any such proposals.

The Traffic Signs Policy Review is due to publish its final report later this summer.

In addition, the Department for Transport plans to revise the guidance on speed limits with the aim of increasing flexibility for local authorities. The Department will provide an economic tool to help them to assess the full costs and benefits of any proposed schemes so that they can use measures which are both appropriate and good value for money.

Notes to editors

1. Local authorities are able to use their power to introduce 20 mph speed schemes in (a) major streets where business on foot is more important than slowing down road traffic and (b) lesser residential roads in cities, towns and villages, particularly where this would be reasonable for the road environment, there is community support and streets are being used by pedestrians and cyclists. Evidence suggests that in residential streets, and in town centres where there is likely to be a conflict between vehicles and pedestrians, carefully implemented 20 mph zones can contribute to an improvement in road safety.
2. The strategic road safety framework, published on 11th May 2011, announced plans to revise and reissue the DfT guidance on speed limits in urban areas with the aim of increasing flexibility for local authorities.
3. It also indicated that the DfT will provide a toolkit to help local authorities assess the full costs and benefits of proposed schemes. This should help them make robustly defensible decisions about speed limits.