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20mph roll out

the national picture

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The purpose of this short report is to provide an overview of the roll out of 20mph limits across local authorities in Scotland.

Background and context

There is a well-evidenced relationship between traffic speed and road safety, both in terms of the number of collisions and the severity of casualties. This is because the [speed of a vehicle](#) directly influences the risk of collision as well as the severity of injuries sustained and the likelihood of death.

[Evidence](#) indicates a pedestrian is eight times more likely to die if they are hit at 30mph than at 20mph. Similarly, for the motorist, the probability of a serious injury to a belted front seat passenger is three times higher at an impact speed of 30mph compared to 20mph. It is therefore clear that lowering speed limits results in [reduced collisions](#), saves lives and results in few injuries, making streets and local communities safer for all.

Additionally, decreasing speed limits also has a wider positive impact in terms of [reducing air and noise pollution](#), [increasing active travel](#) as pedestrians and cyclists feel safer, reducing levels of congestion, and can even [decrease travel times](#).

The benefits of decreasing speed limits has been [recognised by many countries](#), including the likes of Spain, Italy and Finland. The [Stockholm Declaration](#) of 2020 led to international agreement that in settlements where people outside of vehicles mix unsegregated with motorised traffic, the maximum speed limit should be no higher than 20mph.

Notably, the [Welsh Government](#) introduced

their Statutory Instrument (SI) to reduce default speed limits on all restricted roads in Wales to 20mph in September 2023, citing evidence that it will save lives and reduce collisions and injuries.

Analysis of Welsh [road casualty figures](#) demonstrates a 33% reduction in casualties on 20/30mph roads in Q3 2025. The data also indicates that there has been a year-on-year reduction in the number of casualties, as well as a marked decrease in speeding in the two years since introduction.

In Scotland, the approach toward 20mph has not been as straight forward. In the previous parliamentary session, Mark Ruskell MSP secured the right to introduce his Members Bill [Restricted Roads \(20 mph speed limit\) Scotland Bill](#). Like that of the Welsh SI, the purpose of Mark's Bill was to reduce the default speed limit on 'restricted' roads¹ to 20mph, due to the understanding that lower speed limits make streets safer and more pleasant. However, the Bill fell at Stage 1 in June of 2019.

As part of the [Bute House Agreement](#), an explicit commitment was made to roll out a national strategy for 20mph made within the [2022 Programme for Government](#). The actual strategy was introduced in 2024, as the [20mph Speed Limits in Scotland. Implementation Guide](#). The Guide outlined the thinking behind the 20mph roll out and included a Road Assessment Criteria and examples of monitoring and evaluation tools for Local Authorities (LAs) to utilise in their programmes.

1 Restricted roads being most residential streets and minor roads in built-up areas, generally with streetlights.

The strategy directly ties in to the Scottish Government's [Road Safety Framework to 2030](#) which sets out the ambitious goal of Scotland having the safest roads in the world by 2030, and the longer-term vision of zero fatalities and serious injuries on Scotland's roads by 2050. Achieving this vision included adapting speed limits to the features and function of the road.

When the Transport Scotland guidance was introduced, it was the intention for all LAs to have changed their default speed limits to 20mph by [the end of 2025](#), however this has not been the case. Rather, LAs have all taken their own approaches, and are each at different steps in the process.

The purpose of this study is to consider how each of the 32 local authorities have approached the implementation of their 20mph strategies, in order to build up a picture of the roll out at the national level. To do so, each local authority was sent a set of questions, which covered their implementation plans, progress on roll out, pre- and post-implementation monitoring and funding.

As explored in this report, there is progress being made across all 32 authority areas towards a full roll out, but it is a disparate picture, and where some councils have completed and are conducting post-implementation reviews, others have not even begun pre-implementation considerations.

The national picture on 20mph roll out

Progress toward 20mph

The table below outlines where each Local Authority is at in the process of implementing a 20mph roll out in their authority area. As it currently stands, there are five councils who have completed their roll out, twenty-five who are at various stages of roll out, and one who has yet to begin work.

[Angus Council](#) sits in its own category, as they have consulted on a 20mph strategy, and chosen not to implement a roll out across its jurisdiction. Instead, they intend to take a demand-process approach, where roads may be changed following a request for new speed limits through a service request, complaint, elected member correspondence or petition.

Of the twenty-five councils who are in the process of rolling out their 20mph strategy, there are seven who are expecting to complete their implementation progress by the end of this financial year (March 2026), or the very near future. Meanwhile, the

remaining eighteen councils continue to take the necessary actions to continue rolling out 20mph limits across their road network.

While it is less than ideal that progress is so disparate across authority areas, it remains encouraging that the majority are working towards a full roll out on appropriate roads. Many of the local authorities are taking a phased approach to their roll outs, which appears to be favoured as it allows for robust assessment of the road network, as well as supporting delivery.

For example, as Dundee City Council near completion of Phase 1, they are undertaking contracting work for Phase 2 delivery (i.e. for signage) and are also in the process of creating Traffic Road Orders (TROs) and design for Phase 3 areas. Taking such an approach should allow for a continuous roll out, as each phase is being considered thoroughly, allowing for improved road safety.

Roll out complete	
Aberdeen City Council	East Lothian Council
Aberdeenshire Council	Scottish Borders Council
City of Edinburgh Council	
Roll out nearing completion	
Clackmannanshire Council	Inverclyde Council
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	Moray Council
Fife Council	North Ayrshire Council
Highland Council	
Council continuing to roll out	
Dumfries & Galloway Council	Perth & Kinross Council
Dundee City Council	Shetland Islands Council
East Ayrshire Council	South Ayrshire Council
East Dunbartonshire Council	South Lanarkshire Council
East Renfrewshire Council	Stirling Council
Falkirk Council	West Dunbartonshire Council
Midlothian Council	West Lothian Council
Orkney Council	
Council in pre-implementation stage	
Argyll & Bute Council	Glasgow City Council
North Lanarkshire Council	
Council yet to undertake work	
Renfrewshire Council	
Consulted and decided against roll-out	
Angus Council	

Process of developing 20mph limits

Moreover, the majority of LAs seem to be taking the same approach to developing their 20mph strategy. This includes conducting a pre-implementation assessment, with the majority indicating they have utilised [Transport Scotland's Implementation Guide](#) as part of this, and instating Temporary Traffic Road Orders (TTROs), usually for about 18 months, before setting permanent Standard Speed Limit Orders on roads that will remain 20mph. This is because not all roads that were reduced to 20mph will remain so, due to it being found to be inappropriate to reduce the speed, although this so far does not seem to be a common occurrence.

When asked the proportion of roads that will become 20mph, it became evident that a majority of restricted roads across the LAs will become or remain 20mph. For many local authorities, upwards of 80% of their 20/30mph road network will be 20mph following full implementation. Most of the roads that will be default 20mph are those in built up areas, in close proximity to schools and hospitals, and busy roads.

Some Councils have long-standing policies that requires all roads off main distributor roads to be 20mph by default, such as in Fife. Which has meant they have had fewer roads to design and implement TTROs for.

Early success of 20mph roads

As the majority of LAs are still rolling out their 20mph strategies, there has not been a significant amount of post-implementation analysis conducted so far. However, those Councils who have completed their roll out have conducted some studies on the impact the reduction in speed limits. Notably, [City of Edinburgh Council](#) and [Scottish Borders Council](#) have both produced evaluations of their 20mph programmes.

Although the methodologies for the reports differ slightly, both reports found a statistically significant reduction in average vehicle speed on roads that had been reduced to 20mph. In the case of Scottish Borders, this reduction was evidenced across all settlement types, including very rural, rural and urban areas, which provides useful evidence regarding the effectiveness of 20mph speed limits in rural settlements.

Additionally, the evaluation from the City of Edinburgh Council evidenced a reduction in collision rates following the lowering of the speed limit. This included a reduction in both the severity of the collision, and in the number of vulnerable groups (cyclists, motorcyclists, pedestrians) involved in collisions. Similarly,

Challenges to roll out

Although it is evident that there is progress being made in the implementation of 20mph speed limits, it is a slow and disparate roll out across Scotland, and within local authority areas themselves. As a result, it has become somewhat of a postcode lottery for local communities as to whether speed limits are being reduced and they can the benefits associated with this.

Whether progress is being made seems inherently linked to the existence of a clear implementation plan that the LA can follow. It appears that Councils with a written plan, be that a distinct implementation plan, such as in the case of West Dunbartonshire Council, or Cabinet papers, including [Comhairle](#)

a more recent evaluation by [Scottish Borders Council](#) also found a significant reduction in the number of road traffic collisions involving pedestrians, cyclists and motor vehicles within 20/30mph areas. While they have not completed their roll out, Highland Council shared their Road Collision Data from the past five years, which shows a promising trend of a reduction in all categories of collisions since they started rolling out their 20mph programme.

Considering data from Wales, it becomes even more evident that reducing the speed limit has a positive impact in the number and severity of collisions. Road casualty data from before and after the 20mph default in Wales demonstrates a 26% reduction across all severity categories for 20/30mph roads, compared to a 3% increase across all categories for 40mph roads. Indicating correlation between the reduction to 20mph and the severity of casualties.

As such, the success of the City of Edinburgh and Scottish Borders Councils, and Wales, should provide support and encouragement for the other LAs across Scotland to continue their roll out.

[nan Eilean Siar](#), [Dundee City Council](#), and North Ayrshire, are more likely to be further along in their roll out of 20mph roads. This is unsurprising, as these papers point to the Council's taking the time to plan and design their implementation programmes.

However, even where these papers exist, there is no standard design or template for councils to follow, meaning programmes differ between councils to a great degree. This lack of standardisation across LA designs means there is a distinct lack of uniformity in the implementation of 20mph, which is likely to hinder its effectiveness at both a local and national level.

Additionally, whilst the Scottish Government originally indicated they would want all LAs to have completed their roll out by the end of 2025, this has not happened, and the slow approach taken by councils means it is unlikely that there will be what is akin to a nation wide 20mph speed limit on these roads in the coming years.

This also has potential implications for funding. When asked, the majority of councils stated that they would or have used the funding from [Transport Scotland](#) to support their roll out. However, an [FOI release](#) indicates the dedicated funding from Transport Scotland would only be available in 2024/25 for councils who “were ready to implement 20mph speed limits this financial year”. It does not appear that dedicated funding for 20mph programmes will be available after this, and there is no dedicated funding within the 2026/27 budget in relation

to 20mph. This presents a significant barrier to implementation, especially when considering some local authorities noted that further roll out of 20mph limits and any necessary physical measures (i.e. signage) would be dependent on further funding availability.

There are also concerns around the enforcement of the new speed limits. While the case studies from early adopters indicates that lowering the speed limit results in vehicles slowing down, it will still be the case that some cars continue to speed.

Enforcement of speed limits falls to Police Scotland, who have stated that they may be [unable to enforce](#) new 20mph due to a lack of resources. Without proper enforcement, the full benefits of these new speed limits will not be achieved, and the safety of all road users will not be improved.

Next steps

The evidence makes it clear that reducing the default speed limit from 30mph to 20mph helps reduce the number and severity of collisions and casualties. And whilst many of

the LAs across Scotland continue to implement their roll outs, there is more that can and must be done, to ensure that all appropriate roads in Scotland see their speed limits decreased.

Guaranteed funding for implementation

As there a number of LAs who are still in the process of rolling out their 20mph strategies, it is important that funding remain available for them to access as part of this. For example, increases to the [Transport budget](#), particularly in relation to the ‘critical safety’ budget allocation, could be put toward further investment and support for LAs in their roll out programmes.

Having access to guaranteed funding would likely remove financial barriers to rolling out lowering speed limits, which may allow councils to complete their roll outs faster. It may also mean that there is funding available to implement physical intervention measures, such as speed bumps, if it were deemed these were necessary to support enforcement of 20mph.

Awareness raising of default speed limits

One of the key ways of ensuring that lowering speed limits to 20mph is successful is to ensure that there is public awareness of these changes. It would therefore be beneficial for the Scottish Government to engage in a social

marketing campaign, highlighting the need and benefits of lower speed limits, which would help change behaviours and attitudes towards speed changes.

Social marketing attempts to change what is viewed as a socially acceptable behaviour. For example, the belief that other drivers are speeding or that nobody else is driving under the speed limit [can influence the choice of other drivers](#). Creating a campaign around shifting what is acceptable behaviour, i.e. obeying the new 20mph limits, could result in higher compliance.

A campaign would need to be well coordinated on the national level and would likely need to include a multi-pronged approach to ensure that it would reach target audiences. It is also important that any campaign is paired with effective enforcement, as this will likely further lead to behavioural shifts, as drivers face the consequences of speeding on these roads.

A national mandate for reducing default speed limits

As this report has shown, there is good work being done to roll out 20mph limits across the local authorities in Scotland. However, the sporadic nature of the implementation means that there is a postcode lottery for the public to benefit from these changes.

Whilst the Scottish Government may want LAs to remain responsible for the roll out of 20mph within their authority areas, having

national oversight would be beneficial to ensure even progress is being made across each area.

In addition, some national oversight will likely be necessary as part of any social marketing campaign around the 20mph limits. It is therefore crucial that the Scottish Government have a role in scrutinising the national roll out.

Conclusion

It is encouraging that so many local authorities continue to make progress in rolling out their 20mph speed limits. However, the piecemeal approach that is currently taking place is resulting in a postcode lottery for communities, and limiting the positive impact this change can have.

It is therefore time for the Scottish Government to reconsider the benefits of introducing a default 20mph speed limit on restricted roads to maximise the benefits.

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