

Countywide 'A' and 'B' roads speed limit review

This report was prepared for the Department Management Team to describe progress with the countywide 'A' and 'B' roads speed limit review, and is being distributed to elected members for information. It explains how the speed limit review has been undertaken, and makes a number of recommendations on how it will proceed to completion.

1. INTRODUCTION

Following a Service Stream meeting on 12 October 2010, it was agreed to report to DMT on the approach and expected outcomes of the 'A' & 'B' road speed limit review. This is to allow consideration to be given to how an implementation programme might develop to deliver any agreed recommendations bearing in mind the availability of future funding and the need to prioritize staff resources.

2. BACKGROUND

The requirement to review all the speed limits on the County's entire 'A' and 'B' road network stems from the Department for Transport (DfT) Circular 01/2006 'Setting Local Speed Limits'. This guidance formed the foundation of the amended speed limit policy adopted by Hampshire County Council following the report to Cabinet on 18 December 2006.

The amended speed limit policy approved the use of the DfT guidance as a basis for the assessment and setting of all speed limits on the County road network. The overall aim being to ensure that speed limits on County roads are appropriate for the road conditions, in line with current national advice and therefore broadly consistent with other local authority areas.

As part of the published guidance, traffic authorities were asked to review the speed limits on all of their 'A' and 'B' roads and implement any necessary changes, where appropriate, by 2011. Within the guidance the DfT has developed a new framework for assessing appropriate speed limits. This takes into account various factors such as traffic flows, mean speeds, accident rates and road alignment. The assessment framework also helps determine whether other safety features such as traffic calming measures would be required to allow a speed limit to operate effectively. The amended Hampshire policy was still very much in line with existing practices and it was therefore anticipated that the outcome of the 'A' and 'B' road review would not lead to a substantial number of changes being made to the speed limits on these routes.

3. HISTORY OF PROJECT

As the project has evolved, the review has formed three key distinct stages. Stage one was the identification and initial review of all the routes, and is complete. Stage two which is now underway, is to check the collision rate against the accident threshold figure for each section of road where a need for changes has been identified. This stage of the review will recommend priorities for implementation. Stage three is to agree these priorities with the Executive Member for Environment and secure funding prior to publishing the results and consulting with elected members on the detail. This stage will also involve dealing sensitively with those members disappointed at not having their roads prioritized for change.

Initial scoping work was undertaken by the Area Traffic Management Teams to enable a programme for investigations to be established. Each Team produced a spreadsheet of all the routes, divided into manageable sections, within their respective District/Borough areas. For example, from this preliminary assessment the 'A' and 'B' road network covering the Test Valley Borough area alone consisted of 30 routes adding up to nearly 200km and county-wide there was a total of 292 routes adding up to approximately 1255km of designated 'A' and 'B' roads.

In view of the resources required to undertake an assessment of this scale, Mott Gifford were appointed (through the Professional Services Contract then in place) to progress the study as soon as their existing commitment to deliver the first tranche of the 'Village 30' programme was completed. They began in earnest early in 2009 at the same time as progressing the Tranche 2 'Village 30' schemes.

One of the first tasks MottGifford undertook was to arrange a meeting with the respective Area Traffic Management Teams and Police representatives to establish initial priorities based upon experience and local knowledge. A traffic light system for route prioritisation was adopted as follows:

- Red:** High priority routes ~ MottGiffords to review by the end of September 2010. Proposals to be implemented 2011/12.
- Amber:** Medium priority routes ~ network of roads to be assessed as a second priority by HCC in 2011/12 and beyond but the majority of the network is likely to be assessed as 'no change proposed to existing speed limits'.
- Green:** Low priority routes ~ assessed to have no issues and unlikely to result in any recommended speed limit changes.

Route safety is a highly important issue in the prioritisation of the 'A' and 'B' road programme. To ensure that the routes with the most pressing problems were dealt with first, a joint review was held with HCC's Safety Engineering Team (SET). Using personal injury accident record data for the countywide rural main road network SET assigned and ratified route priorities. Accident data was carefully examined and the individual routes driven by SET and MottGiffords to enable recommendations to be formulated. As a result, the initial recommendations for routes in Area North, together with drawings illustrating the proposed changes, were completed by the end of March 2010.

Using the Area North model as an example MottGiffords progressed the remaining 'A' and 'B' road routes incorporating SET's studies into relevant injury accidents. This first stage of the project was completed at the end of September 2010.

4. CURRENT STATUS OF PROJECT

A summary of the present recommendations for each area, which could potentially lead to proposals being developed for detailed design, formal Traffic Order consultations and implementation of changes to speed limits are as follows:

AREA	DISTRICT/ BOROUGH	NUMBER OF 'RED' ROUTES	NUMBER OF INDIVIDUAL SECTIONS OF SPEED LIMIT CHANGES
East	Winchester	12	22
	East Hants	10	22
West	New Forest	13	30
	Test Valley	9	22
North	Basingstoke	6	19
	Hart	5	11
	Rushmoor	1	1
South*	Fareham	2	2
	Gosport	2	2
	Eastleigh	2	3
	Havant	2	4
TOTAL		64	138

*In view of the largely urban characteristics of the area, such as Gosport, Havant and Fareham which forms part of Portsmouth conurbation, the majority of routes are subject to speed limits lower than the National Speed Limit. Hence only 8 routes (2 in each of the Borough areas) have been identified where changes to the speed limit have been initially recommended.

The total length of sections of routes where speed limit changes are recommended is approximately 180km which equates to approximately 14% of the entire 'A' and 'B' road network. This indicates that the speed limits on 86% of the whole of the 'A' and 'B' road network are set at an appropriate level, reflecting the general characteristics of the road and its environment. A key component and aim is to align the local speed limit so that the original mean speed driven on the road is at or below the new posted speed limit for that road.

Road safety is a further key component in the prioritisation process of identifying routes to be assessed in accordance with the DfT's guidance on setting speed limits. The criteria for considering lower speed limits is that they should be appropriate for the type of road, prevailing traffic conditions and be located where there is a significant number of personal injury crashes occurring. The DfT's suggested accident threshold for upper tier roads, which reflects expected levels associated with a road carrying a given level of traffic and an appropriate balance between safety and mobility, is 35 injury accidents per 100 million vehicle kilometres.

In order to determine if each of the recommended routes meets this accident threshold and that mean traffic speeds are at an appropriate level or additional measures to reduce traffic speeds are required, the following data needs to be obtained for each specific section of route where a change of the speed limit is recommended:

Number of personal injury accidents,
traffic flows, and
traffic speeds

Accident data for each section of route has been collated. The Traffic Monitoring Group are currently engaged in providing any relevant existing traffic volume and speed data. Where no existing data is available, traffic speed and volume checks will be requested as appropriate. Work to progress the recommendations of Area West has shown that the level of existing data available for all of the sections of routes was 43% , with the remaining 57% of sections of routes requiring speed and/or volume data to be obtained.

It is anticipated that Stage 2 of the project to be completed, with final recommendations for all routes, before the end of March 2011. Depending upon the level of traffic volume and speed data required to be obtained on site and the workload this entails, recommendations maybe available earlier.

5. FUNDING

Before a capital budget was set for the 'A' and 'B' road review an initial revenue budget of £95K was approved, to cover the preliminary work carried out by MottGifford's. To the end of March 2010 approximately £98K was spent.

Of the original capital allocation, £175k remains. In addition to this amount there may be external funding available through developers' contributions to supplement this figure.

6. WAY FORWARD

The recommendations for these routes will be reported and shared with the Executive Member for Environment and the HAT's at the earliest opportunity.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

To enable the 'A' and 'B' road speed limit review to be progressed further it is recommended that:

- (i) The contents of this report are noted.
- (ii) A further report be prepared for DMT detailing the final outcomes of the review process (Stage 2) and a proposed programme showing the schemes that can realistically be implemented (Stage 3) in accordance with future resource availability, taking into account those which meet the accident threshold and those where the mean speeds are already appropriate or where additional measures are required to obtain the appropriate mean traffic speeds.
- (iii) The recommendations for these routes will be reported and shared with the relevant HATs at the earliest opportunity.
- (iv) That the effectiveness of the introduction of any speed limit changes implemented through this programme be monitored in terms of casualty reduction, as with all other safety lead programmes of work.