

SEVENOAKS JOINT TRANSPORTATION BOARD – 12 DECEMBER 2007

SPEED LIMIT REVIEW

Report of the: Head of Transportation & Planning West Kent

Status: For Consideration

Portfolio Holder Cllr. London

Head of Service County Transportation Manager – Mr. David Hall

Recommendation: It be RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

Background

- 1 At the last meeting of the Joint Board members requested that a report be submitted on the issue of speed limits.
- 2 “Circular Roads 1/2006 Setting Local Speed Limits” supersedes “Circular Roads 1/93”. The new document gives guidance on the setting of speed limits and requires that all “A” and “B” class roads in the county are brought up to the standards contained in the document by 2011. It reaffirms the government’s commitment to 20mph limits in residential areas and 30mph limits in villages. It also provides guidance for lowering speed limits on rural roads. The implications of the circular have been considered and the County’s Highway Advisory Board meetings in September 2006 and January 2007.

National speed limits

- 3 Despite the County Council’s suggestion at the consultation stage that the national speed limit for single carriageway roads should be lowered from 60mph to 50mph, the government has concluded that the national limits should stay the same but with a greater emphasis on local determination. They have also reaffirmed that in street lit 30mph limits repeater signs cannot be used.

Change from 85th percentile to mean speed

- 4 Although the 85th percentile speed measurements still offer a useful guide to how drivers perceive the appropriate speed of a road, in future mean speeds will be used to set local speed limits. It is possible that the use of mean speeds will produce lower limits.

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Villages

- 5 The document states “It is government policy that, where appropriate, a 30mph speed limit should be the norm in villages”. However, it is likely that additional engineering works will be required to enhance the 30mph message and to reduce the dependency on Police enforcement.

20mph Limits

- 6 The government is supportive of the use of 20mph speed limits and zones. It is clear, however, that such zones should be self-enforcing and that in the majority of cases without the addition of traffic calming measures schemes will be unsuccessful. The Council already has a very robust methodology for selecting 20mph limits and zones based on crash reduction which ensures that limited resources are allocated to the most appropriate schemes. This message is enhanced in the recent KCC policy on traffic calming which confirmed Members concerns regarding the over use of physical traffic calming measures in the county.

Increased speed limits

- 7 The government has stated that this new guidance could bring about increased speed limits “where it is safe to do so” and where the guidance indicates that a wrong speed limit is currently in place. Such increases should be considered carefully as such a move will be extremely unpopular. However, this new document makes it clear that drivers should expect a consistent standard of application across the country so it is important that such changes are fully considered and widely consulted on.

Pilot Study Area

- 8 The government is giving a clear indication that speed limits on rural roads need to be lower and fit more closely with the speeds that the majority of drivers are already travelling at and also meets the aspirations of local people. In rural communities there is a widely held view that the national speed limit of 60mph on all rural roads is inappropriate.
- 9 With so many miles of rural road in the county it is important that a consistent approach is applied and the Highways Advisory Board agreed that there should be a Pilot Study Area to assess the likely practical and financial implications of implementing the new guidance.
- 10 The Pilot Study area is south of Maidstone and is bounded by the A26, A21 and A229. The area contains a number of B roads and villages. Detailed assessments of existing traffic speeds, crash records, road side features and signing are being undertaken.
- 11 Until such time as the results of the Pilot Study have been assessed the Cabinet Member for Environment and Regeneration has agreed that we should not consider changes to speed limits in other areas of the County

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unless there is clear justification as part of a Crash Remedial Scheme. Furthermore, he wrote to all parish councils to this effect in August 2006.

The Next Steps

- 12 It is expected that there will be a further report to the Highways Advisory Board in January 2008. This will consider the outcome of the Pilot Study and the countywide programme for the review of existing speed limits.

Key Implications

Financial

None for Sevenoaks District Council as a result of this report

Resource (non-financial)

None for Sevenoaks District Council as a result of this report

Legal etc.

None for Sevenoaks District Council as a result of this report

Sources of Information: None

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