

Proposed recommendations for changes
to the guidelines for setting speed limits in
Ireland.

Report to the Chair and Members of the
Traffic and Transport SPC

9th of November, 2022

Introduction

A working group comprising members of the Traffic and Transport Strategic Policy Committee (SPC), representative from An Garda Síochána, a retired Garda Chief Superintendent and Superintendent and Members of the Executive was set up in 2022. Its aim was to review the guidance on the setting of speed limits with particular reference to 30 Kph speed limits and the difficulties that have been faced while applying them in a dense urban environment.

Following a number of meetings and the circulation of a briefing paper and worked through discussions in a number of areas the working group has concluded that the following would be the recommendations that the Traffic and Transport SPC could consider to go forward to the Department of Transport for amendment of the guidelines for setting speed limits in Ireland.

The members considered a number of items including: -

1. A report by Senior Engineer Bernard Rennicks (circulated with this report) which outlines the guidelines for setting of speed limits and how it impacts on setting of speed limits in the city areas.
2. A presentation on speed data and its application on a number of roads when setting speed limits.

The report from Bernard Rennicks highlighted a number of issues with the current guidelines including the setting of speed limits on distributor roads, lack of guidance on the consideration of vulnerable road users and the issue of the guidance being primarily around the engineering aspects of a road.

The members considered the report and the presentation regarding speed data and the difficulties which this throw up in setting appropriate speed limits and also in providing traffic calming and matching the 85th percentile speed to the desired speed.

The members then agreed that the following were their recommendations to go to the Traffic and Transport SPC for consideration.

Recommendation 1

In order to improve road safety, encourage people to adopt forms of active mobility, reduce traffic congestion and pollution, the guidance on setting speed limits should now allow that the default speed limit in a city area may be set at 30 km/h, a change from the current situation where the default speed limit in a built up area is set at 50 kph. While at present a special speed limit may be set at 40kph or 30 kph, these are exceptions to the 50 kph limit and not the default. It must be stressed that this does not mean that every road will be at 30 kph but roads which have a different speed limit will have to be specifically listed and the rationale for not making them 30 clearly set out thus making it clearer that within built up urban areas that higher speeds are not endorsed.

This would allow for less signage and clutter of speed signs in the city, it would clarify the position for motorists and it would send out a clear message regarding the desire for reduced speeds in the city area. It will support the move to more people using Active Travel and it reflects the fact that within the Dublin City Council area a high proportion of roads are already set at 30 kph. With a default speed limit of 30 in place in an urban area it would allow for this default to be in place even where no traffic calming has been put in but where pedestrians and

cyclists mix with car traffic without physical segregation and would highlight those roads which have been left at the other speed limits and the necessity for increased caution as a vulnerable road user when using them.

Recommendation 2

There is no clear guidance on how vulnerable road users need to be considered when making a speed limit, there needs to be the ability to take into account their numbers and types with schoolchildren and the elderly having different requirements and considerations. There is need to be able to consider traffic segregation, the impact of higher road speed limits on visually and mobility impaired also and the impact of too great a speed differential on cyclists.

This guidance would help to clearly set out how these users should taken into account when considering setting of speed limits and what steps should be taken to ensure that they are not being excluded from the speed limit setting process. The default position should be a 30 kph limit and the rationale for endorsing a higher speed limit and its impact on vulnerable road users would have to be set out.

Recommendation 3

A road deemed a distributor road, under the current guidance, cannot at present be set to a 30kph speed limit, even where the traffic is moving at close to the 30kph. However this requirement should be changed so that a 30 kph speed limit can be applied to a distributor road based on an analysis of the road design, traffic volumes and segregation, population of surrounding areas of the road, along with location of schools shops medical care and the desire lines across the distributor road.

At present a road that acts as a distributor cannot be made 30kph, however the consideration of the function of the road is presently made primarily based on engineering considerations and without proper consideration of the use of the road by residents along the road. Two large catchment areas may be either side of the road with strong active travel links across the road for schools shops etc. but these items are not necessarily being factored in at present. There is a requirement for the guidance to also take into account change of uses alongside a road and revision of a speed limit accordingly, an example of this would be increased density of housing with corresponding increase in walking and cycling as a result of other types of developments in the surrounding area.

Recommendation 4

When considering change of speed limit on a road there should be clear guidance on the type and nature of interventions which could be made on a road in order to meet its target speed. At present speed surveys play a part in the determination of the speed limit which applies on a particular road and so if the 85th percentile speed is used then setting of the speed limit in order to match means that in fact the use of the road is being dictated by the current speed that traffic uses on the road rather than a target speed limit which takes consideration of residents and use of the road by non-motorised traffic into account. Therefore the use of traffic calming interventions even on distributor roads should be allowed and encouraged in order to meet the target speed reduction, and ensuring the design of the road is in accordance with the concept of self-explaining roads.

The explicit statement that there should be a target speed limit for a road which is set based on a range of criteria and not simply the 85th percentile speed should be embedded in the setting of speed limits process. The use of traffic calming and the change in visual cues for drivers should all be set out also so that there is clear guidance on how speed reduction may be accomplished.

Data on speed and accidents.

The working group also expressed their view that there is a clear and pressing requirement to ensure better and more timely data collection of speed data, accident data and especially the seriously injured data and they would urge that this information be made available to local authorities in as timely a manner as possible. There is a need to better analyse this data and be able to use it when considering changes to speed limits.

I would ask that the Traffic and Transport SPC Members would consider and approve the recommendations above so that this can be conveyed to the Department of Transport and the Minister for Transport.

**Chair of the Working Group on Speed Limits
Councillor Carolyn Moore**