



20MPH URBAN/VILLAGE LIMITS – THE JOURNEY FROM LOCAL INTERVENTION TO NATIONAL NORM

By Rod King

HOW IT ALL STARTED

It all started with a holiday. Each year I had ventured from Warrington in Northwest England on a solo cycling holiday. About 1000km (621 miles) of cycling, somewhere in Europe. In 2004 I decided to visit Warrington's twin town, Hilden in Germany, where I had heard that 23% of in-town trips were by cycle. And so I set off hoping to see what sort of cycling provision and infrastructure had led to this level of cycling. I arrived via Hull, Rotterdam, Netherlands and Dusseldorf, seeing plenty of cycle lanes and provisions on the way. But in Hilden there was nothing; the town engineer explained how in the early 1990's they had decided that the biggest threat to cyclists was from the differential speed compared to motors (Ed note: motor vehicles).

They couldn't speed cyclists up, but they could slow motors down. They had set a 30km/h (18.6mph) limit across the whole town and allowed cyclists to travel both ways on any one way for motors street. This was done without any speed bumps or physical calming and was the foundation of their walking and cycling strategy.

Note that equivalent metric and imperial speeds are:

30mph = 48.3km/h	50km/h = 31.1mph
20mph = 32.2km/h	30km/h = 18.6mph

Once understood, the logic was impeccable. And with 25% of in-town trips by public transport, I realised that for every 100 people moving around Hilden they had about 40 fewer cars being used than in Warrington. The question for me was: "Why are we tolerating prevailing speeds of motors in Warrington of **30 miles per hour**, which were 60% higher than that tolerated in our twin-town of **30 kilometres per hour**?"

Photo credit: Rod King

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

- Margaret Mead

I came home and within Warrington Cycle Campaign I started to question our town transport officers as to why a general 20mph limit was not possible. I was met with derision and disbelief that I thought slowing traffic could be done. I wrote a report titled **“A tale of two cycling cities”** that compared Warrington with Hilden and followed it up with gaining an insight into the guidance on setting local speed limits published by the UK DfT (Department for Transport).

As background, it should be noted that in 1934, the UK Government had set a national speed limit of 30mph wherever there were street lights with a frequency of less than 187 metres (200 yds). Local authorities could set different speed limits, higher or lower than 30mph, on a street by street basis by issuing a Traffic Regulation Order. Since 1991, 20mph limits had been allowed, but these were predominantly for individual streets rather than areas, and certainly not as a norm. There was also a suggestion in the DfT guidance that 20mph limits (without physical calming) should only be used where the 85%ile speed beforehand was less than 24mph (38.6km/h).

My report on the “two cities” was noticed in cycle campaigning circles and I was asked to present it at Velo-City 2005 held in Dublin. In doing so, I caught the ear of Dublin City Councillor, Andrew Montague. He invited me back to Dublin to talk to their Traffic Committee and in 2006 he introduced Dublin’s first 30km/h speed limits in part of the city centre and a number of small residential areas.¹

Meanwhile, back in England I started to campaign in walking and cycling advocacy circles for 20mph as a foundation for walking and cycling.

I had realised that the wide benefits of 20mph go well beyond walking and cycling advocacy. Here was an intervention that also **reduced noise, created better equality on the roads, enabled economic transport at minimal cost**, could reduce emissions and could reduce casualties for walkers, cyclists and also motorists.

Rather than having a 30mph norm and only slowing down in some special places to 20mph and requiring physical calming because it is abnormal, why not set a general 20mph limit as a norm and only speed up to 30mph where it was safe for pedestrians and cyclists? I also found that doors would open for someone who could talk about these wide societal benefits that could be gained from a simple and inexpensive intervention. This became a key factor in gaining wide-scale interest and adoption.

A big opportunity came in 2006 when the DfT guidance on setting 20mph limits was changed to end the use of 85%ile speeds as an indicator of suitability and instead use mean speeds. At a single stroke this enabled far more roads to be within guidance for a 20mph limit.

The first local authority to take advantage of this was Portsmouth City Council where three recent pedestrian fatalities on a city street made a compelling reason to lower the speed limit across the city. Portsmouth therefore started planning a change to 20mph for most 30mph roads in the city. The first phase of setting 20mph was completed in June 2007. The change in Portsmouth was a game changer as it was now possible to point to a real example of where a city-wide 20mph limit had been introduced.



Photo credit: Rod King

¹ECF - Rolling out 30 km/h speed limits in Dublin City - <https://ecf.com/news-and-events/news/rolling-out-30-kmh-speed-limits-dublin-city>

CHRONOLOGY OF THE ACCEPTANCE AND GROWTH OF THE 20's PLENTY CAMPAIGN

The following is a brief summary of the creation of the **20's Plenty campaign** and how it spread across the UK since that fateful cycle holiday in 2004 and the visionary adoption of 20mph by the Portsmouth City Council in 2007.

Early years of 20's plenty for us

At some point I was viewed by others as being knowledgeable on the setting of 20mph limits and community representatives started to approach me for an explanation of what could and couldn't be done in their locality. Therefore in November 2007, I set up **20's Plenty for Us**² in order to provide support to those who were interested with a web platform for articles, evidence and news on 20mph limits. The 20's Plenty website became a "go to" for assistance, and its many visits demonstrated that there was a developing demand for moving to a better sharing of the public spaces that we call streets in our communities. And because my time was voluntary and with few resources, local communities were encouraged to set up their own local 20's Plenty for Us campaign. On request I would also speak at public meetings arranged by local campaigners to explain the benefits of 20mph and answer questions.

Over the next five years, **20's Plenty for Us** helped to set up dozens of local campaigns around the country.

2010-2016

By 2010, 20's Plenty for Us had received some funding and was able to gain the services of a part-time campaign co-ordinator. Anna Semlyen had been running a successful 20's Plenty for York campaign, and was the author of a book on "Cutting your car use"³. 20's Plenty for Us expanded its website and recruited more local campaigns, assisted in local meetings and made the case for 20mph across the UK.



Photo credit: Michael Coghlan, Speed Limit-30mph, Taynuilt, Scotland, United Kingdom, 2008. <https://flic.kr/p/4HSS8t>

In these years multiple authorities had implemented or were implementing authority-wide 20mph limits without physical calming, where most streets were set with a 20mph limit. This included my own town of Warrington which conducted a wide-area pilot and in 2011 decided to set a 20mph limit for most roads in the borough. It also included Oxford, Warrington (my own local authority), Bristol, Brighton & Hove, Cambridge, Liverpool, Bath & North East Somerset, York, Edinburgh, Lancashire, Newcastle and the London Boroughs of Islington, Southwark, Hackney and Camden. By 2012, 4 million people lived in local authorities with a wide-area 20mph policy. 20's Plenty for Us interest from London campaigners resulted in us appointing Jeremy Leach as the part-time London Campaign Co-ordinator to liaise with communities and boroughs in London. Jeremy is also a director of Action Vision Zero.

In 2013 the guidance⁴ from the DfT (UK Department for Transport) was also changed to reference the success in Portsmouth and to advise wider adoption of 20mph limits, including main roads. By 2013 20's Plenty for Us had 185 local campaigns across the UK with a few in other countries. 20's Plenty was coming of age and in June 2013 I was delighted to receive an **MBE honour from the Queen in recognition of Services to Road Safety**.

² 20's Plenty for Us website – www.20splenty.org

³ Anna Smelyan Axel Scheffler "Cutting Your Car Use: Save Money, Be Healthy, Be Green!" Green Books. (January 1, 2000)

⁴ Dept for Transport UK Government – Setting Local Speed Limits - <https://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2013-0106/DfTCircular01-2013SettingLocal-SpeedLimits.pdf>



Photo credit: Michael Coghlan, Speed Limit-30mph, Taynult, Scotland, United Kingdom, 2008. <https://flic.kr/p/4HSS8t>

The focus of the 20's Plenty support to local campaigns was the empowerment of local campaigners. Our Briefing Sheets⁵ were developed and published on many aspects of implementing 20mph. Newsletters were published and circulated on successes. Resources such as stickers, banners and graphics were made available and most importantly advice on how to successfully advocate for change.

20's Plenty local campaigns were differentiated from most advocacy organisations by having a wide spectrum of members—not just cyclists, or walkers, but also those seeking quieter calmer streets, healthier streets and more environmentally-friendly streets. 20's Plenty was a campaign that brought people together on a **common cause** that was achievable, beneficial to all and cost-effective. It was also apolitical with advocates and implementing local authorities from across the political spectrum.

2017

By 2017 there were 304 local 20's Plenty campaigns. These involved thousands of campaigners and in order to fully support them, the 20's Plenty team was enlarged with a part-time campaign co-ordinator for the South East. Adrian Berendt had been leading the 20's Plenty for Tunbridge Wells campaign and is also a trustee for the Campaign for Better Transport. 2017 was also the year in which the **UN Global Road Safety Week** focused on speed with a Slow Down Day Toolkit provided by 20's Plenty. This was used globally to help road safety organisations hold events advocating lower speeds and limits.

2018

In 2018 a government funded report⁶ by Atkins on 20mph limits was published. This clearly showed the public support for 20mph as a norm, but crucially it did not look at authority-wide implementations of 20mph, instead focussing on smaller isolated interventions. 20's Plenty criticised⁷ the report for its weak conclusions obtained from not properly conducting an analysis of the effect of 20mph limits on reducing casualties incurred on residential roads.

Also in 2018, the UK Government devolved the setting of national speed limits to the Welsh and Scottish governments. This meant that both governments had the power to change the national 30mph limit to 20mph with approval of their devolved parliament. 20's Plenty therefore engaged with political parties in Wales and received cross-party interest and support. There was a real appetite for change from all parties. Each year 20's Plenty had held a conference and in 2018 held it in partnership with Cardiff City Council which, earlier in 2016, had announced their own commitment to 20mph as a norm.

⁵ 20's Plenty Briefing Sheets - <https://www.20splenty.org/briefings>

⁶ 20mph Research Study – Process and Impact Evaluation Headline Report - <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5bf2bab940f0b6078acc6f-4d/20mph-headline-report.pdf>

⁷ Letter in Local Transport Today – Unanswered questions about the DfT's 20mph Study - https://www.20splenty.org/ltt_letter_10th_may

2019

In 2019 the Scottish Government considered a national 20mph default limit proposed by the Green Party but decided not to proceed. But elsewhere progress was being made on 20mph adoptions. Transport for London commenced implementing 20mph limits on arterial roads. The London Boroughs of Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster also set 20mph for all roads resulting in 20mph becoming the norm for all Inner London Boroughs.

Charities in active travel and road safety began to call for a national 20mph default. In Wales the government created a 20mph Task Force to report on how a national default 20mph limit for restricted roads could be implemented.

Public support was also shown in the UK when the Government published its *National Transport Attitudes Survey* showing a consistent 70% in favour of a 20mph limit for residential streets (Figure 1).

Speed limits of 20mph in residential streets

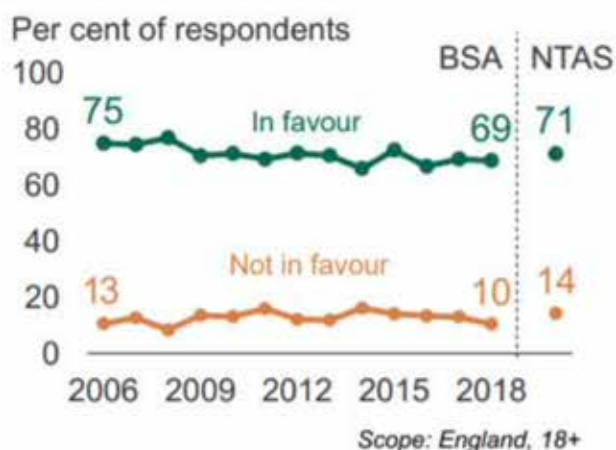


Fig. 1 Response to National Travel Attitudes Survey on supporting a 20mph limit for residential streets.⁸

2020

And then came the year of COVID. But just before the pandemic clamped down on travel, at the 3rd Ministerial Conference on Road Safety 130 ministers endorsed the Stockholm Declaration⁹ which for Speed Management had a simple resolution to:-

11. Focus on speed management, including the strengthening of law enforcement to prevent speeding and mandate a maximum road travel speed of 30 km/h in areas where vulnerable road users and vehicles mix in a frequent and planned manner, except where strong evidence exists that higher speeds are safe, noting that efforts to reduce speed in general will have a beneficial impact on air quality and climate change as well as being vital to reduce road traffic deaths and injuries;

Here were 130 nations recognising that wherever vulnerable road users shared spaces with motor vehicles, then 30km/h (or 20mph) should be the norm and recognising the beneficial outcomes.

COVID enabled everyone to see the benefits of active travel. In the UK, Government funding was made available to local authorities to set 20mph limits and other changes to support active travel.

In July 2020 the Welsh Government 20mph Task Force published its report¹⁰ and recommendations on setting a national default 20mph limit for built-up areas and this gained cross-party support for implementation in Senedd (Welsh Assembly).

Larger cities in UK were also asking central government to allow setting of 20mph as a default both in London and Birmingham rather than it being set street by street. Whilst being rejected by government, the aspiration for widescale adoption in cities was registered.

⁸ UK Government DFT - National Travel Attitudes Study: 2019 Wave 1 Page 10 - <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5d0cb3dded915d094666a780/national-travel-attitudes-study-2019-wave-1.pdf>

⁹ The Government of Sweden - Stockholm Declaration Resolution - Page 4 <https://www.government.se/information-material/2020/02/stockholm-declaration/>

¹⁰ Welsh 20mph Task Force Group - Final Report - <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-07/20mph-task-force-group-report.pdf>

By 2020, 20's Plenty for Us had expanded to 413 local campaigns and local authorities implementing "total 20" had increased with a total population of 21 million people now living in such places.

2021

In 2021 30km/h urban/village limits were the sole "Love 30" focus of the UN Global Road Safety Week. Thousands of events in communities around the world were calling for 30km/h or 20mph limits as a norm.

Scotland committed to "20mph as a norm" across all local authorities as part of its national Road Safety Strategy. This was planned to be implemented by 2025.

Spain set a 30km/h national limit for all urban roads with a single lane in each direction and 20km/h if there was no separate pedestrian provision.

The UN incorporated the Stockholm Declaration into the UN Global Plan – Decade of Action on Road Safety 2021-2030.¹¹

For this reason, in urban areas where there is a typical, predictable mix of road users (cars, cyclists, motorcyclists, and pedestrians), a maximum speed limit of 30 km/h (20 mph) should be established, unless strong evidence exists to support higher limits.

Communications and engagement has always been an important part of 20's Plenty's work, especially on social media, and in March 2021 we were able to secure the part-time services of a graphic artist, Sue Nicholls.

2022

In 2022 results were coming in from community-wide 20mph limits implemented during the pandemic. These included Scottish Borders and Faversham in Kent and showed that where faster roads were included the reductions in speed on the faster roads were up to 10km/h (6mph).¹² This was double that estimated in the 2013 DfT guidance.

In Wales the Senedd (Welsh Parliament) approved the setting of the national 20mph default to be effective 17th Sept 2023.

At the 20's Plenty Conference in Oxford, shire counties including Oxfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Cornwall were showcasing their roll-out of 20mph as a norm.

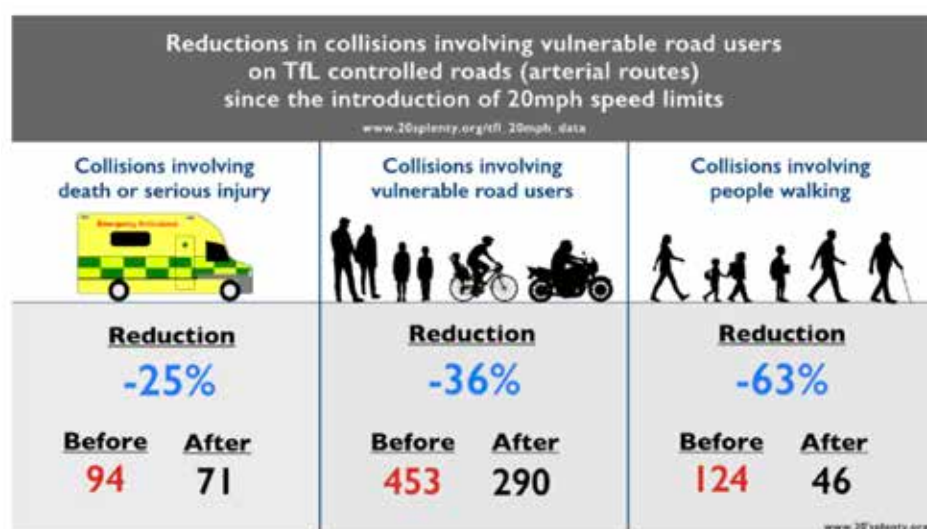


Fig 2. Casualty reductions on TfL arterial roads with 20mph limits¹⁴

2023

In 2023 a Transport for London (TfL) Report¹³ showed major casualty reductions when 20mph had been set on its arterial roads (Figure 2).

¹¹ UN - Decade of Action on Road Safety 2021-2030 page 20 - <https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/documents/health-topics/road-traffic-injuries/global-plan-for-road-safety.pdf>

¹² 20's Plenty for Us – Big Benefits from 20mph on Faster Roads - https://www.20splenty.org/big_speed_reductions

¹³ Transport for London - TfL Press Release - New data shows significant improvements in road safety in London since introduction of 20mph speed limits - <https://tfl-newsroom.prgloo.com/news/tfl-press-release-new-data-showssignificantimprovements-in-road-safety-in-london-since-introduction-of20mphspeed-limits>

¹⁴ TfL Press Release - New data shows significant improvements in road safety in London since introduction of 20mph speed limits - <https://tfl-newsroom.prgloo.com/news/tfl-press-release-new-data-showssignificantimprovements-in-road-safety-in-london-since-introduction-of20mphspeed-limits>

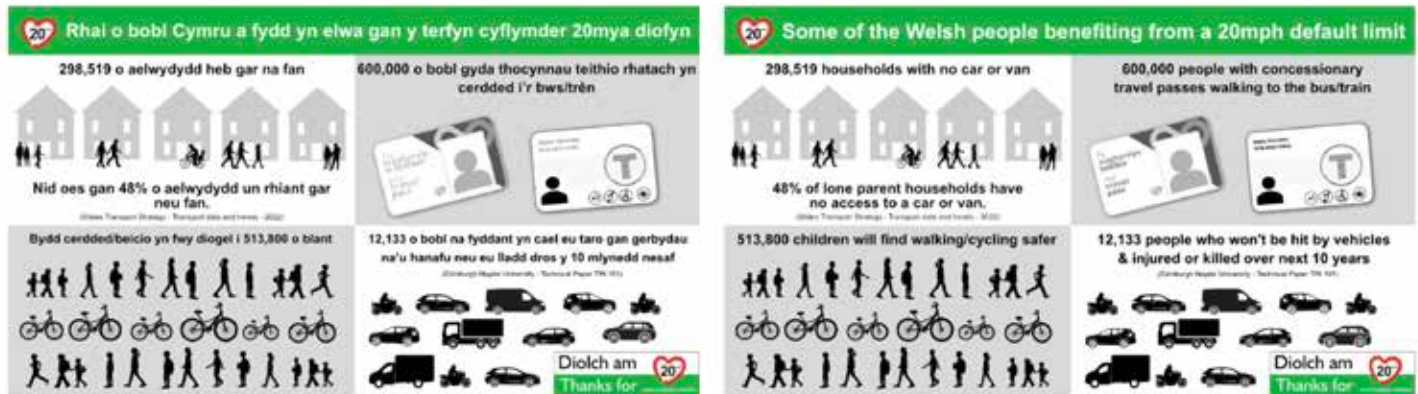


Fig 3. Graphics in both Welsh and English on the people benefitting from 20mph limits in Wales

Transport for London committed to setting a further 220km of arterial roads to 20mph by 2024.

During 2023, 20's Plenty engaged with the 700+ Town and Community Councils in Wales with newsletters in Welsh and English as well as monthly "Diolch am 20" (Thanks for 20) informative Zoom sessions (Figure 3).

On 17th September, the Welsh 20mph law came into effect. Before implementation 2% of the road network was at 20mph and 37% at 30mph. After implementation this changed to 38% and 2% respectively.

In Scotland at the 20's Plenty conference in Edinburgh, the Scottish Transport Minister outlined plans for 20mph as a norm in Scotland, with early adopters such as City of Edinburgh, Highlands and Scottish Borders Councils presenting their experiences alongside presentations from Wales.

By the end of 2023, 20's Plenty for Us had 702 local campaigns and 30 million people in UK lived in authorities where 20mph was or soon would be the norm (Figure 4).

2024

In Scotland the 20mph roll-out has been further confirmed with Glasgow setting nearly 4,000 additional streets at 20mph.

In Wales an expected review¹⁵ of the 20mph implementation was been conducted and revised guidance¹⁶ on setting 30mph exceptions to the national 20mph limit published. This maintains the foundation of the Stockholm Declaration and a Safe System. We expect it to allow some nuancing of the roads excepted but no radical change.

Cumulative 20's Plenty local campaigns by year

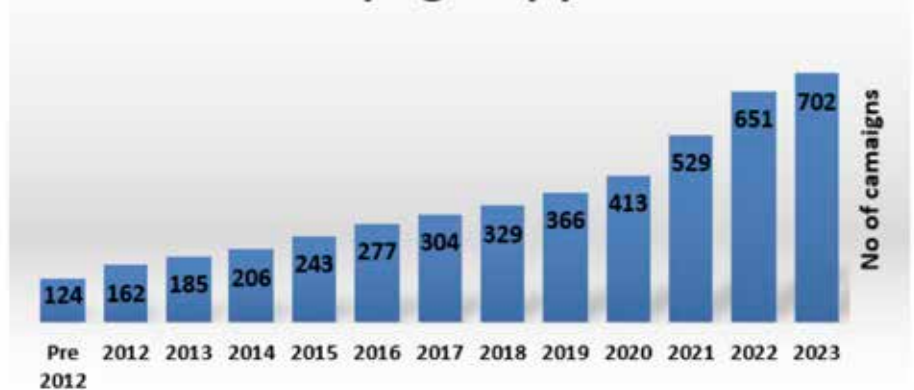


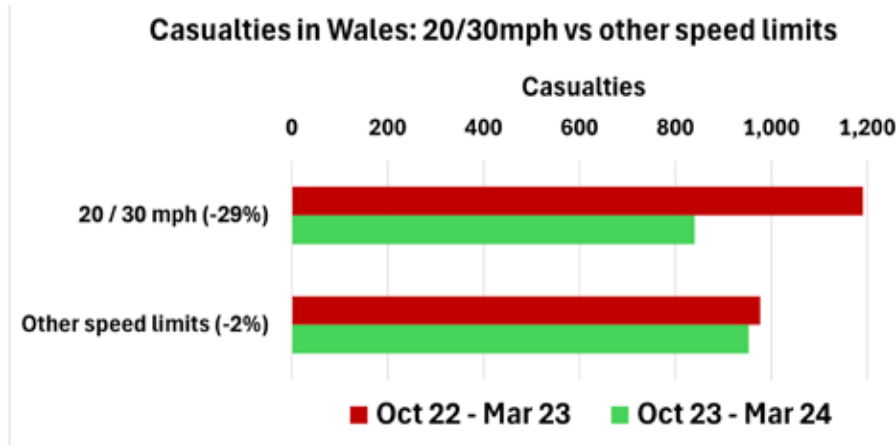
Fig 4. 20's Plenty local campaign growth by year.

¹⁵ 20mph Default Speed Limit Review of Exceptions: Final Report - <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2024-05/20mph-default-speed-limit-review-of-exceptions-final-report.pdf>

¹⁶ Welsh Government - Setting 30mph speed limits on restricted roads: guidance for highway authorities <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/pdf-versions/2024/7/2/1721139821/setting-30mph-speed-limits-restricted-roads-guidance-highway-authorities.pdf>

Whilst there is some noisy opposition to the national 20mph limit in Wales, the road casualty results from the first six months after implementation are very encouraging with a 29% reduction in casualties compared to a similar seasonal period in the previous year as shown in Figure 5, which combines 20mph and 30mph roads to take account of the change.

We did not see this having any credibility from a road danger or place-making perspective.²⁰ Interestingly many Conservative candidates for Mayoral elections, Police and Crime Commissioner elections and Member of Parliament elections campaigned against 20mph limits; they were largely unsuccessful and in Wales not a single Conservative MP was elected.



With a new Labour Government elected in the UK on July 6th we expect a commitment to a Road Safety Strategy that includes targets, a Safe System approach and the endorsement of the Stockholm Declaration. We also expect a far greater commitment to Active Travel. This will inevitably result in greater adoption of 20mph in the UK.

Fig 5. Reduction in casualties in Wales after introducing a national default 20mph limit¹⁷

This aligns with data from insurance company esure which reported a 20% reduction in accident damage claims from that expected for the periods concerned.¹⁸

It was disappointing to see that the Conservative party in UK Government recently has adopted an antagonistic attitude to 20mph limits. It issued new guidance¹⁹ in March 24 on setting local speed limits as part of its “ending the war on the motorist” campaign.



Photo credit: Joseph Raynor/ Nottingham Post, Wales Online, More speed limit reductions could follow on the approaches to 20mph zones on some roads, 2024. <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/people-saying-theres-no-logic-29530714>

¹⁷ 20's Plenty – Huge drop in casualties in 1st 6 months of 20mph in Wales - https://www.20splenty.org/wales_1st_6_months

¹⁸ Esure Group Press Release - https://www.esuregroup.com/media/muqdfwsf/esure-20mph_10_06_2024.pdf

¹⁹ 20's Plenty FAQ -Is the guidance on exceptions being changed - https://www.20splenty.org/w_faq09

²⁰ 20's Plenty Briefing on March 24 DfT Guidance Update - https://www.20splenty.org/dft_guidance_2024

WHAT NEXT FOR 20'S PLENTY FOR US

We believe that the reason for our success to date has several factors:

- 20mph limits deliver across a wide range of societal benefits. It's not just casualty and road danger reduction. It's more comfortable active travel with all the benefits to public health. It's mobility fairness for those unable to drive such as young, elderly and those with disabilities. It's emissions reduction through smoother driving. And most of all it's making our places better places to be. It also aligns with global best practice.
- 20's Plenty for Us is a highly focussed campaigning organisation which is successful in presenting the case for 20mph limits at national and local level both politically and within the transport profession. It comprises a small team with experienced and committed members.
- 20's Plenty for Us' real strength is in the thousands of local campaigners who 20's Plenty for Us supports with empowerment to enable them to campaign as effectively as possible.
- 20mph and 30km/h as a norm is being adopted by progressive nations and cities across the world. It is no longer a radical idea but a key component of any Safe System approach.

By 2025, 120 out of 207 highway authorities in UK will have adopted 20mph as an urban/village norm. This includes the whole of Wales and Scotland. It includes all the major conurbations, most London Boroughs and an increasing number of shire counties and unitary authorities. The "national" 30mph limit is clearly no longer national after having been rejected by authorities with nearly half the UK population. With additional local authorities deciding that 20 is plenty for them in one form or another we expect it to become inevitable that 20mph will become the de-facto norm for urban/village roads in the next 5 years. A 20's Plenty on-line conference on "Delivering 20mph" in October 2024 showcased local authorities that have been implementing 20mph and attracted 500 attendees. A video²¹ of the webinar is available.

On a personal note, after 20 years of pro-bono work as Founder and Campaign Director, I have decided to take a lesser role in 20's Plenty for Us. I am transitioning into a Founder and Chair role. I have confidence that the team of directors in Anna Semlyen, Adrian Berendt and Jeremy Leach will continue their excellent work supporting our local campaigns across the UK and beyond as well as making the strong case for 20mph and 30km/h as an urban/village norm.

20's Plenty started off as an idea learned from a twin-town in another country. It has become a movement that has enabled thousands of campaigners to create "better places to be" for millions of people.



Photo credit: Rod King

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Rod King is Founder and Advisor, 20's Plenty for Us CIC. 20's Plenty for Us is a Community Interest Company based in the UK and influencing globally. We support the UN and its call for default 20mph and 30km/h urban and village limits. A presentation on this subject may be viewed at: <https://vimeo.com/1014021152>

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²¹ 20's Plenty Online Conference – Delivering 20mph - <https://vimeo.com/1018634830>