



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Regional Development

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill:
20's Plenty for Us

17 June 2015

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Trevor Clarke (Chairperson)

Mr Seán Lynch (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Joe Byrne

Mr John Dallat

Mr Alex Easton

Mr Chris Lyttle

Mr David McNarry

Mr Stephen Moutray

Mr Cathal Ó hOisín

Witnesses:

Mr Rod King

20's Plenty for Us

The Chairperson (Mr Clarke): I welcome Rod King MBE, campaign founder and director of 20's Plenty for Us. I believe you have travelled from England to be with us here today. You are very welcome to Northern Ireland, and we look forward to hearing what you have to say on the programme.

Mr Rod King (20's Plenty for Us): Mr Chairman, thank you for inviting me. I am delighted to be here. 20's Plenty for Us is fully supportive of the Bill. I am not sure whether you are aware, but the whole 20's Plenty movement in the UK has a Northern Ireland connection. Ten years ago, in June 2005, I travelled to Belfast to cycle to Dublin to speak at the international Velo-city conference. I will start by comparing the streets of Warrington, where I live, with its twin town of Hilden in Germany. There a 30 kph or 18.5 mph limit had been set for all roads in the early 1990s. It was the foundation of their walking and cycling strategies. When I visited Hilden in 2004, I found that 23% of all in-town trips were made by bicycle. Belfast, though, was not just en route; it enabled me to meet up with the late Tom McClelland, a Northern Ireland cycling champion who had encouraged me to present my report at the conference. At that time, the UK had no wide-area 20 mph limits and only isolated 20 mph zones with regular physical calming.

After campaigning locally in Warrington, in 2007 I set up 20's Plenty for Us to assist other communities that wanted lower speeds throughout their city, town or village. Now we have 265 local campaigns, and I am delighted to say that 14 million people now live in places where most roads have a 20 mph limit or will get a 20 mph limit without physical calming as part of the local authority policy. It is what we call Total 20. I am also honoured that my work as founder of 20's Plenty for Us was recognised with the award of an MBE for services to road safety in 2013. In fact, most of the UK's iconic cities have rejected the national 30 mph urban limit as not fit for purpose for most roads. I am pleased to have been involved in most of those implementations. Total 20 places now include 75% of all the inner London boroughs, including the City of London, Oxford, Cambridge, Manchester, Birmingham,

Liverpool, Newcastle, Edinburgh, Coventry, Lancaster, York, Brighton, Bath, Portsmouth, Bristol, Warrington, Nottingham, Leicester, St Helens, Wigan, Halifax, Middlesbrough, Chichester, Darlington and more. In addition, we should not forget the county authorities, such as Lancashire, Sefton, Calderdale, Bath and North East Somerset and other places, where all towns and villages have been treated with Total 20.

The evidence in favour of lower speeds and limits is overwhelming. Casualty reduction, lower noise, lower pollution, better healthy travel options, more liveable neighbourhoods, safer child mobility and extended aged mobility are all enabled when we recognise that going at 30 mph on roads where people live, walk, work, shop, learn or play is no longer appropriate. It is not even as though going at 30 mph provides any real benefit. Any rational and objective analysis of traffic movement will tell us that speeding up when you can will merely get you to the next congestion point or junction a second or so earlier only so that you can wait a second or so longer. In today's crowded urban networks, journey times are dictated not by how fast we go but by how long we are stopped. While those benefits of slower speeds go to the community at large, they are particularly delivered to the most vulnerable: the young, the elderly, the partially sighted, the disabled and the disadvantaged. Those are the very people who are all within our moral compass yet who seem so easy to forget when we are in the comfort of our warm, protective, quiet and inwardly safe vehicle as we drive through community streets. That is why so many authorities, organisations and government bodies say that 20 mph is plenty for most of their streets.

In recent implementations, what is noticeable is that authorities understand that it is far more about reflecting and developing social consensus than traffic management. It is about drivers not responding to signs but making a conscious lifestyle decision about how they will drive and share the public spaces between our buildings that we call streets. In particular, the moving of public health from the NHS to local authorities in England has brought their important bigger picture perspective and behaviour change expertise to decisions on how transport policies affect long-term community health. Their involvement provides a holistic and multi-agency approach to making community streets better places to walk, cycle and bring physical activity into everyday life. That is why this should be seen not as a narrow traffic initiative but as a visionary project, with traffic as partners alongside Departments dealing with public health, social services, environment and education.

The 20's Plenty places I mentioned use many community engagement initiatives that enable communities to take ownership and to value the change that is taking place in their streets when they get lower limits. That community ownership is an important factor in drivers owning the benefits of compliance for their family in their streets.

I could go further in explaining the benefits of wide-area 20 mph limits, but, instead, I will focus on the detail of the Bill. In Northern Ireland you are uniquely positioned, in that your legislative domain covers the same area as your single traffic authority. Many of those cities adopting Total 20 wish to have that same power. You have the luxury of coordinating legislation and speed limit setting to minimise red tape and maximise cost-effectiveness and timely delivery. The aligning of a 20 mph limit to unclassified restricted roads in a new residential road category is progressive and pragmatic. At a stroke, it removes much of the work in creating the tens of thousands of traffic regulation orders required under the current regime. The Bill's approach is certainly to be commended and is one that delivers real, long-term community and fiscal benefits.

Such a blanket re-categorisation and setting of speed limits will be much cheaper than the usual costs of £2 to £3 per head for traffic regulation orders and engineering. That may all be diverted for funding engagement programmes. Why have staff endlessly toiling over the administration when resources could be better used for marketing and engagement? Signage will still be required at entry/exit points, but with Northern Ireland planning 20 mph for residential roads, 20 mph will be the norm, rather than the exception, and you will have little need for repeated signs. However, you may wish to selectively add those to categorise roads remaining at 30 mph. In such cases, any lit road without repeaters would be deemed to be 20 mph roads.

Those are the community streets where we will all control our speed and go faster on those other roads only where deemed appropriate. That allows a Northern Ireland-wide engagement to act as a catalyst for behaviour change. You will be able to overlay local community celebration and ownership with national marketing and consensus.

Members should be aware that 20 mph limits have a high degree of public support. Successive British social attitude surveys show that over 70% of people agree that it is the right limit for residential

streets and, wherever implemented, resident satisfaction with the policy increases after implementation.

On Lancaster's 20 mph roads, a 70-year-old has more time to cross the road and walk to the shops. In Edinburgh, the proportion of children cycling to school rose from 4% to 12% when they introduced 20 mph limits. In Orford in Warrington, casualties fell by 27% on residential roads when they were given 20 mph limits. The question is really about the children of Belfast, the elderly residents of Larne and communities across Northern Ireland. How long will they have to wait to get the streets that those communities deserve?

The Bill is visionary, effective, pragmatic and progressive. It will make Northern Ireland an even better place to be. I urge you to proceed with its adoption, and I will be pleased to assist in any way possible.

The Chairperson (Mr Clarke): Thank you, Rod, for your presentation. I am the Chair, but I have an opinion on this as well. I can see benefits, but I can also see difficulties with it. Whilst you say that we are at an advantage in how we can legislate here, some of us have a concern — I certainly do — about a blanket approach. We have seen evidence, and I take the evidence that you are suggesting today, but what concerns me is that, if we just go with a blanket approach, communities will not be consulted. It will be a mandatory regime. I will make a statement, rather than ask a question first, Rod. For many years here, we have had the introduction of traffic-calming measures. At the start, the community welcomed them, but after a period of time, people would rather see them removed. In England, is there any evidence that detections for speeding have increased or decreased?

Mr King: I think that detection is a separate issue. The first thing is that this is not about putting in physical calming, so therefore those —

The Chairperson (Mr Clarke): Sorry, it is not about what?

Mr King: It is not about putting in physical calming, and therefore those reactions from communities who say, "We do not necessarily want this physical calming" will not be there. There is plenty of evidence to show that, wherever you put 20 mph limits, there are speed reductions. Because you are taking a consistent approach that says, "Don't do it in an isolated way; do it across the whole community, except arterial routes", you will get some roads where speeds were already low and you will not get a drop. That is OK. But there will be many other roads where speeds are faster, and those speeds will reduce. Experience shows that the reduction is somewhere between 0 mph and 7 mph, and that usually is dependent on the speed beforehand. So, there is plenty of evidence that speeds do reduce.

The Chairperson (Mr Clarke): One piece of evidence that interests us all, obviously, is the reduction in the number of injuries, particularly to pedestrians or cyclists. However, some of the evidence that some of us have seen shows that, whether the limit is 20 mph or 30 mph, in many cases the driver of the vehicle that caused the accident was driving at excess speed anyhow. That is why I am wondering how reducing the speed limit further will change the driver habit.

Mr King: One of the points is that you are looking at this in the context of traditional traffic management. The difficulties of getting behaviour change were mentioned. The approach of 20's Plenty for Us is not about putting up some signs on some posts so that people respond to them; it is about an engagement process, whereby communities really look at what their streets are for. What do they want from them? How can those public assets be used? How can they be better used by children walking to school? How can they be used by the elderly if they have more time to cross the road? The importance of this initiative is that it transfers that ownership to the community.

I was in Edinburgh for the start of its roll-out of 20's Plenty for Us on Monday, and the people there were talking about the engagement programmes they are doing. In Liverpool, where 20 mph limits are being rolled out, they are involving community celebrations and local football stars are backing the scheme. There is a huge debate about what we want in our communities, villages and towns for our streets and our movement. That is a huge catalyst for behaviour change.

Mr Lynch: You are welcome to Ireland, Rod.

The Chairperson (Mr Clarke): Even Northern Ireland.

Mr Lynch: We will not fall out.

You mentioned Edinburgh, which we visited some time ago. You said that the proportion of children cycling to school rose from 4% to 12% during the period the 20 mph limit was rolled out. Were there factors for that increase other than the 20 mph roll-out?

Mr King: They found that in the Southside area, where they did a large pilot and initial phase. That is what Edinburgh City Council is reporting. One of the things that you find is that, where local authorities are doing this, they are also doing other things. This is not a panacea or a sole initiative for walking, cycling and active travel, but it is perhaps the foundation for those things. Streets that have a 30 mph limit will never be friendly for children to walk and cycle on.

Mr Lynch: Comparatively speaking, the density of the population here is much different to that in England. This is much more of a rural community. The vast majority of injuries, deaths and fatalities happen on rural roads. The Bill does not cover that. What is your opinion on the fact that the Bill does not cover the roads on which most of the fatalities take place?

Mr King: I think that there are huge ongoing benefits. When we look at how children's independent mobility is constrained by the speed of traffic, we can consider things like their ability to walk to the shops, to walk to school and to visit their grandparents. Look at the elderly and when they start to say, "It takes me longer to cross the road now, so I don't think I'll walk to the shops two or three times a week. I'll stay in." Those are all costs to society. It is a cost to society when the elderly lose their ability to be active. Therefore, so many of the benefits from lower speeds come from other savings to communities and to the NHS and from just making more liveable places.

Mr Lynch: Just one final question. You are aware that, within the legislation, we can get 20 mph limits by using calming measures. I live in an area that has 20 mph speed limits. Do you think that that is insufficient for what the Bill intends to do?

Mr King: One of the problems with traffic calming is that it tends to communicate with people by discomfort and by making it uncomfortable for them to drive above the speed limit. It is extremely expensive: it is about 50 times more expensive than putting in a 20's Plenty for Us uncalmed street. That means that, for the same cost, you can treat 50 times as many communities.

The other problem is that, if you put in isolated physically calmed zones, you are telling people to speed up everywhere else. That is what this is about: resetting the reference point at which we drive around our communities. That is where it has such a tremendous knock-on effect on behaviour change.

Mr Lynch: Just finally, finally, Chair. How can this be policed? Is it a case of changing mindsets, as you set out at the beginning?

Mr King: I think that it is important to talk about compliance, rather than enforcement. Enforcement plays a role, and it has been found that light-touch enforcement early on is important, but we also find that, where there is most social engagement, there is most compliance. An important aspect of it is to have that engagement and ownership within communities so that they feel that they are making their places better places to be in.

Enforcement is done in different ways around the country. It can include a community speed watch and full enforcement and prosecution. In Liverpool, where people have been caught speeding outside a school, they are given the option of taking a fixed penalty notice, going on a speed awareness course or sitting down in front of some children who will listen to their case. Some of them say, "Well, we will sit down in front of the children, thank you very much". They go in and have three or four 11-year-olds giving them a grilling about why they were endangering the lives of them and their colleagues. I have to say that they give a grilling that is just as harsh as the ones that you are used to giving the people from the Departments. Communities are finding their own way of doing it. That community ownership is so important. You have the ability to still have that community ownership but to overlay it with a national consensus that says, "This is a good thing for all our Northern Ireland communities". That is where you have a benefit.

By the way, I take your point that many Northern Ireland communities are not like those in Edinburgh or Bristol or whatever, but you can take it that Lancashire is probably not that different in its mix of

communities. In Lancashire, you will find that all the villages and towns have a 20 mph policy for residential non-arterial streets.

Mr Dallat: Rod, you are very welcome. I am sorry that I was not here for the introduction. You have my total support, but is it not disappointing when organisations such as the Federation of Small Businesses and Belfast City Centre Management do not back you? What could you do better to get those people on board? They can certainly influence for change.

Mr King: Talk. That is a very important aspect of this. When people start really getting to grips with what roads we are talking about, they realise that we are talking about residential roads. We are not talking about the arterial roads. How fast do we want to go on residential roads? How much difference does it make? What are the benefits to businesses in terms of the mental health of their employees, which comes from lower speeds, lower noise and lower casualties? That is one thing that comes out. If you talk about the issue of 20 mph limits and making better places, eventually, you will resolve that, and you will get people on board. That is happening in many places where authorities have said, "We are going to talk to businesses, and we are going to get them on board". If you take the City of London, which is run by businesses, they were totally in favour of it for their 400,000 workers who come into the City of London every day.

Mr Dallat: Down through the years, the problem of road fatalities in Northern Ireland has been a serious one. In fact, it is probably not realised by enough people that, during the Troubles, more people died on the roads than through violence, reaching a peak in 1972 of 370. I do not want to move between the things that we are discussing, but there is something embedded in my mind from this morning. On the Portglenone to Randalstown Road, if I had not taken to the ditch and created space for a car overtaking, there would have been multiple fatalities. In situations like that, would anybody even think of phoning the police and reporting that car? There is something still in our psyche that gives priority to vehicles and excuses drivers' bad behaviour. Rod, I know that you are doing your best, but how do you change that in the way that attitudes towards smoking, for example, were changed? Is it not something much bigger than you can accomplish in your campaign?

Mr King: My campaign has a total income of around £20,000 per annum. We have 0.7 people employed on it, and we have 14 million people who have changed the whole way in which they are using their streets. I have every confidence that, when you start talking about 20 mph limits, when you start looking at the benefits, when you involve public health — and I know that one public health director used a particular slide that shows, I think, something in the order of 128 cycle deaths in 2008; 2,500 people killed altogether on the roads; and 32,000 people dying of chronic heart disease attributed to inactivity — and once you start to look at the bigger picture, you start to have that meaningful discussion. You have a mechanism to deliver in Northern Ireland. You have that ability to say, "We can do this cost effectively through this Bill". It is not just a technical thing. You have to spend the money on the engagement around this issue. That is what local authorities are doing. In Calderdale, they are spending £500,000 on the traffic engineering — the signs — and another £500,000 is being paid from public health for the engagement process. That is how important it is to act as the catalyst and for everybody to feel that the sharing of those roads and how they use their vehicle has a direct impact on how everybody else can go about their life. That is a big ask, but there is a huge gain. That is what this Bill gives you the opportunity for.

Mr Dallat: You are basically saying to me that there is an opportunity now to change forever people's views of speed limits in urban areas and that that is something that we need to invest in to change attitudes.

Mr King: Yes, but it is not expensive when you consider that the costs tend to be around £2 to £3 a head. That is what is typical from the costs in England. You can probably do it a little cheaper or, as I said, spend that money instead on the engagement to give you more scope there.

Mr Dallat: Rod has made a very important contribution to our evidence gathering, and I hope that his presence this morning will create the process that, I think, is needed to get this Bill through.

Mr Ó hOisín: Thank you, Rod. Sorry I missed your presentation; I had another appointment. If some of this has been touched on, I apologise.

I think that we have seen compliance on a number of what otherwise would have been seen as restrictive pieces of legislation that have been brought in. I am thinking particularly of seat belt

wearing, which is now universally accepted. It is rare to hear of anyone being done for no seat belt. Another one is the legislation on smoking in public places, which we embarked on some short years ago. The only difficulty that I see in this is that definition of residential road. I do not know whether you have touched on the actual physical definition. I come from a village where it is nigh on impossible to get up to 20 mph, and we are on a main arterial route. What qualifies for the definition of residential road?

Mr King: The Bill says that if it is uncategorised and it is lit, it should have a 20 mph limit. There will be some roads where that may not be appropriate, and, equally, there will be some roads that are categorised and, because they are in a high street or have a high population or walking or cycling density, should be 20 mph as well. This Bill gives you the ability to restrict so easily the 90% of those roads that are clearly residential and which clearly should be restricted to 20 mph. You may have to invest some time and effort into that definition for that odd 10%, but that is far more cost-effective than trying to do a ground-up approach to examine every road to see whether it will be included.

Mr Ó hOisín: In the rest of the country, there is a campaign to reduce the speed to 20 kph, which is 13 mph. What are your thoughts on that?

Mr King: Interestingly, a couple of months ago, I was invited by the Road Safety Authority to present and talk at its conference on child safety. This issue came up, and I was aware of the 20's Plenty campaign in kilometres there. That is very much similar to the home zones that they have elsewhere. I think that there is a movement in Ireland to look at whether it should not be 30 kph in the same way that it is for most northern European countries. That is being adopted wholesale for northern European countries and also places like Milan, Paris and so many different places and villages. So, yes, the 20 kph has its place, but you have to get the right reference point, and the right reference point is 20 mph for residential streets. In some places it may be higher, where it is 30 mph, and, in some places, it may be more appropriate to have it lower, but you have to get the right reference point.

Mr Ó hOisín: Would there be merit in the introduction of a European-wide level, such as 30 kph?

Mr King: I cannot see that happening. There is certainly a strong recommendation at EU level that 30 kph, or 20 mph, should be the norm for any roads that do not have segregated cycling and walking provision. So, there is, de facto, certainly that strong standard, which is being adopted throughout the EU.

Mr Easton: The Bill is going to cost between £6 million and £26 million. That is the estimate. You mentioned that the Bill will save public funds. Can you explain how it is going to save funds? How will the implementation of the Bill save funds?

Mr King: I think that £26 million is a little bit —

Mr Easton: It says between £6 million and £26 million.

Mr King: Remember that I am not a proposer of the Bill. I can tell you that in England and Scotland, we are looking at between £2 and £5 per head of population. In a mixed place like Warrington, with a population of 200,000 and where there are a number of villages — it is not a contiguous urban development — it cost £500,000 for 200,000 people, I think. I would say that £26 million is a little high. I suspect that it would end up costing somewhere between £5 million and £10 million, if it is gone about in the right way. You have every opportunity, through the Bill, to do it in an economic way by taking away a lot of the red tape that is involved in traffic regulation orders.

Mr Easton: So, is that where the savings that you mentioned would come from?

Mr King: The savings that I mentioned would arise because you would not have to do a traffic regulation order for every street, so you would take away that administrative cost. Incidentally, one of the things that are happening throughout England is that the costs are being shared between traffic, road safety and public health. Wide, wide benefits are being seen, and so the funding is coming from different purses.

The Chairperson (Mr Clarke): There are no more questions, so, thank you, again, Rod. We have two other presentations on the subject; you are welcome to stay.

Mr King: OK. If there are any other detailed questions, I will be happy to answer them by email. You will see that we have about 60 briefing sheets on our website. We hope that everything is covered there.

The Chairperson (Mr Clarke): Thank you, and safe journey home.