



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for Regional Development

# Report into the Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill

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Ordered by the Committee for Regional Development to be printed 14 October 2015  
Report: NIA 267/11-16 Committee for Regional Development.

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# Membership and Powers

## Powers

The Committee for Regional Development is a Statutory Departmental Committee established in accordance with paragraphs 8 and 9 of Strand One of the Belfast Agreement and under Assembly Standing Order No 48. The Committee has a scrutiny, policy development and consultation role with respect to the Department of Regional Development and has a role in the initiation of legislation. The Committee has 11 members, including a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, and a quorum of 5.

The Committee has power to:

- consider and advise on Departmental budgets and Annual Plans in the context of the overall budget allocation;
- approve relevant secondary legislation and take the Committee Stage of relevant primary legislation;
- call for persons and papers;
- initiate enquiries and make reports; and
- consider and advise on matters brought to the Committee by the Minister of Regional Development.

## Membership

The Committee has 11 members, including a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, and a quorum of five members. The membership of the Committee is as follows

- Mr Trevor Clarke MLA (Chairperson) <sup>12</sup>
- Mr Sean Lynch MLA (Deputy Chairperson) <sup>3</sup>
- Ms Claire Hanna MLA <sup>11</sup>
- Mr Adrian Cochrane - Watson MLA <sup>10</sup>
- Mr John Dallat MLA <sup>2</sup>
- Mrs Brenda Hale MLA <sup>5, 12</sup>
- Mr Chris Lyttle MLA <sup>8</sup>

- Mr Declan McAleer MLA <sup>4</sup>
- Mr David McNarry MLA <sup>1</sup>
- Mr Stephen Moutray MLA <sup>9</sup>
- Mr Cathal Ó hOisín MLA

<sup>1</sup> With effect from 06 February 2012 Mr David McNarry replaced Mr Michael Copeland

<sup>2</sup> With effect from 23 April 2012 Mr John Dallat replaced Mr Joe Byrne

<sup>3</sup> With effect from 02 July 2012 Mr Seán Lynch replaced Mr Pat Doherty as Deputy Chairperson

<sup>4</sup> With effect from 10 September 2012 Mr Declan McAleer was appointed as a Member

<sup>5</sup> With effect from 16 September 2013 Mrs Brenda Hale replaced Mr Ian McCrea

<sup>6</sup> With effect from 07 October 2013 Mr Joe Byrne replaced Mrs Dolores Kelly

<sup>7</sup> With effect from 24 September 2014 Mr Trevor Clarke replaced Mr Jimmy Spratt as Chairperson

<sup>8</sup> With effect from 29 September 2014 Mr Chris Lyttle replaced Mr Kieran McCarthy

<sup>9</sup> With effect from 06 October 2014 Mr Stephen Moutray replaced Mrs Brenda Hale

<sup>10</sup> With effect from 30 June 2015 Mr Adrian Cochrane - Watson replaced Mr Ross Hussey

<sup>11</sup> With effect from 07 September 2015 Ms Claire Hanna replaced Mr Joe Byrne

<sup>12</sup> With effect from 05 October 2015 Mrs Brenda Hale replaced Mr Alex Easton

# List of Abbreviations and Acronyms used in this Report

DRD	Department for Regional Development
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
NILGA	Northern Ireland Local Government Agency
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
RAC	Royal Auto Club
SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour Party

## Executive Summary

1. The Committee for Regional Development (the Committee) is unanimous in its support of the principle as espoused in the Bill, namely the reduction of road fatalities in Northern Ireland. The Committee would also welcome any action that would result in a reduction to these tragedies that bring so much suffering to so many families across Northern Ireland.
2. The Committee further commends the Bill Sponsor (sponsor), Mr Pat Ramsey MLA, for raising this very important matter in the House and for encouraging a wide-ranging debate on the subject matter both in Plenary and during the Committee Stage.
3. The majority Committee view is that, whilst the proposed legislation is merited, it is, nonetheless, unnecessary for the following reasons:
  - The Department for Regional Development (DRD) already has existing powers to set a range of speed limits, including 20 mph, under the Road Traffic Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and have, to date, legislated for some five hundred 20 mph zones in Northern Ireland;
  - The principle of the proposed legislation is not achieved, namely a significant reduction in the numbers of fatalities on Northern Ireland roads. This is primarily due to the fact that some 80% of fatalities on Northern Ireland roads occur on rural roads which are not addressed by the proposed legislation;

- The “blanket approach” to the imposition of 20 mph of the legislation is not supported by the majority of respondents to both the original sponsor of the Bill, Mr Conall McDevitt and the current sponsor of the Bill; and
  - The absence of a “bottom up” consultative approach, as has been shown to be so effective in other jurisdictions with regards to the implementation of such schemes is negated by the proposed statutory imposition of restricted limits.
4. The Committee is not opposed to the imposition of 20 mph speed limits but believes that the evidence it has received would show that the identification of “priority areas” for zonal restrictions, rather than speed restrictive areas, as is evidenced elsewhere in the UK and Ireland, is a preferred approach, both from the identification of “black spots” and in the adoption of a holistic approach to addressing fatalities in populated communities.
  5. The Committee is critical of DRD due to their insistence of a continual “piloting” process and the length of time taken to implement this and have made recommendations accordingly.
  6. The Committee supports the Sponsors assertion that, as a priority, a holistic approach should be adopted focussing, in the first instance, around schools and public housing developments. The Committee welcomes the fact that planning regulations will place this as a consideration.
  7. The Committee has made recommendations as to how this might be furthered should the proposed departmental changes be imposed. However, these recommendations are equally applicable on a joined-up governmental approach.

8. The Committee would wish to thank the Bill Sponsor, Mr Pat Ramsey MLA, for his contribution to the debate surrounding this Bill. In addition we would wish to thank all those who provided evidence to the Committee during the course of their consideration of the Bill
  
9. Finally, the Committee would thank the former Minister and departmental officials for their contribution to the consideration of the Bill, particularly Mr Gerry Anketell MBE for his guidance and advice on this and previous legislation placed before Committee. The Members of the Committee for Regional Development would wish him a long and healthy retirement.

## Introduction

10. In May 2012, SDLP MLA, Conal McDevitt, launched a consultation seeking views on a Private Members Bill to reduce speed limits from 30mph to 20mph in designated residential areas.
11. Mr McDevitt received 41 responses during the seven week consultation period which can be viewed *here*.
12. Following this, the Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill (the Bill) was introduced by Mr McDevitt MLA in June 2013 before being re-introduced by Mr Pat Ramsey MLA following Mr McDevitt's resignation from the Assembly in September 2013.
13. The Bill would amend the Road Traffic Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, which is the road traffic law pertaining to speed limits, by introducing a 20mph speed limit in residential roads to reduce the number of road accidents and fatalities.
14. If passed, the Bill would introduce this new national speed limit on residential roads defined as *'a road which is provided with a system of street lighting furnished by means of lamps placed not more than 185m apart'*.
15. The Bill, was introduced into the Assembly on 9 September 2013 and successfully completed its Second Stage on 17 February 2015.
16. As part of the Committee Stage, the Regional Development Committee (the Committee) received written evidence in from the following witnesses:

- Mr Pat Ramsey MLA (Bill Sponsor)
- Councillor Alan Girvan
- Councillor Tommy Jeffers
- The RAC
- Sustrans
- 20's Plenty for Us
- The Institute of Public Health in Ireland
- Playboard
- The Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA)

17. The Committee received oral evidence from:

- Mr Pat Ramsey MLA (Bill Sponsor)
- The Department for Regional Development (DRD)
- The Police Service for Northern Ireland (PSNI)
- Sustrans
- 20's Plenty for Us
- Playboard

## Summary of Recommendations

18. The Committee recommends that the Department desist from the concept of piloting zones as this delays the full and necessary introduction of schemes in priority areas.
19. The Committee recommends that the Department review its consultation processes with the view of making them more succinct.
20. The Committee recommends that the Department identifies and reviews current initiatives, such as the Active Schools Programme, to ensure a holistic approach to road safety. This should include a fundamental review of budget allocations to ensure that implementation of a universal approach can be implemented.
21. The Committee recommends that the Department also consider implementing 20 mph zones where, for example, greenways intersect with major roads and where such roads are in proximity of recreational facilities such as parks and youth centres.
22. The Committee would call on the Department to include a radical roll-out of prioritised initiatives as a future Programme for Government target.

## Key Issues

23. The principle of the Bill, as originally expressed by the Bill Sponsor, was to reduce the number of road fatalities in Northern Ireland. This is undoubtedly a worthy cause, one which the entire Committee and, no doubt, the entire Assembly and wider community fully support.
24. The Committee is supportive of the identification and implementation of suitable sites or 20 mph zones - the clear evidence is that zoning of such sites does result in a significant reduction in speed and, importantly, road casualties. Whilst any reduction in road fatalities and accidents is to be welcomed, the significant reduction that the Bill seeks to address will not be achieved as the majority of fatalities on Northern Ireland roads occur in rural areas. The proposals contained within the Bill do not have any impact in respect of rural roads.
25. The Committee is aware that the Department currently has the powers to introduce such zones under the Road Traffic Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. This is evidenced in that over 500 schemes have been introduced by the Department in Northern Ireland where 20 mph zones have been implemented.
26. Indeed, a number of further schemes were introduced on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2015 in *Belfast City Centre*, Merville Garden Village, Newtownabbey, Whitehall, Ballycastle, Langley, Ballynahinch and Rosses, Ballymena through the *powers* currently held by the Department.
27. The Committee is not, however, content with the concept of piloting further 20 mph, given that over 500 schemes are currently in

existence. The Committee believes that there is sufficient evidence supporting the introduction of zones. **The Committee recommends that the Department desist from the concept of piloting zones as this delays the full and necessary introduction of schemes in priority areas.**

28. The Committee is in favour of the identification and zoning of areas rather than the blanket approach proposed in the Bill. Indeed, during the Second Stage debate on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2015, the Bill Sponsor *stated* “*Key to the success of the legislation is the mechanism for how we launch it. It will not be successful if new limits are imposed. Rather, we seek not a blanket ban but a phased-in, community-requested, community- and stakeholder-led approach with the Police Service, the public transport service and residents and young people alike. Community consensus is key to the success of the initiative*”.
29. The Committee concurs that community engagement is integral to any scheme, as has been proven in other areas such as Edinburgh and Portsmouth. Indeed, Rod King MBE from the 20 is Plenty campaign stated during his *oral evidence* that, “*...where there is engagement, there is most compliance*”. This view was supported by *Sustrans* who indicated, “*We feel strongly that community engagement and, therefore, ownership of 20 mph, should be an important part of the implementation*”. The blanket approach proposed by the Bill in its current format would, therefore, remove the “bottom up” approach favoured by many of the witnesses. The current departmental approach, however, includes consultation with local communities from the outset.

30. Whilst the Committee agrees the approach, it remains concerned that the lead-in time for the consultative process is too protracted. A consultative process that can take up to two years before the commencement of zoning schemes is unacceptable. **The Committee recommends that the Department review its consultation processes with the view of making them more succinct.**
31. The Committee is of the view that a more holistic approach to the prioritisation of potential zoning areas should be adopted by the Department. The proposed restructuring of the Department into the Department for Infrastructure provides significant opportunities for it to do so, particularly as road safety is a responsibility that is proposed to transfer to it.
32. The Department currently operates, in conjunction with Sustrans, a very successful Active Schools programme, working with nearly 200 schools across Northern Ireland to enable more pupils to walk, cycle or scoot to school, rather than rely on a lift from their parents. Such programmes, particularly whenever the road safety responsibilities transfer, offer the potential for the holistic approach referred to, whereby the physical infrastructure surrounding the schools can also be prioritised. Such an approach will also commence the change in mindset, education and culture that all the witnesses wished to see.
33. The Department should not limit itself to zoning in the priority areas it has identified. Rather, the Committee would urge the Department to take the initiative and identify other areas where there are, for example, high pedestrian or cycling numbers or where high youth activity is evident, such as parks and youth centres.

- 34. The Committee recommends that the Department identifies and reviews current initiatives, such as the Active Schools Programme, to ensure a holistic approach to road safety. This should include a fundamental review of budget allocations to ensure that implementation of a universal approach can be implemented.**
- 35. The Committee recommends that the Department also consider implementing 20 mph zones where, for example, greenways intersect with major roads and where such roads are in proximity of recreational facilities such as parks and youth centres.**
- 36. Finally, the Committee would call on the Department to include a radical roll-out of prioritised initiatives as a future Programme for Government target.**
- 37. The Committee for Regional Development commends this report to the Northern Ireland Assembly.**

## Links to Appendices

You can view the The Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill *here*.

You can view the Explanatory and Financial Memorandum *here*.

Memoranda and Papers from the Department for Regional Development can be viewed *here*.

Memoranda and Papers from Others can be viewed *here*.

Minutes of Proceedings can be viewed *here*.

Minutes of Evidence can be viewed *here*.

You can view written submissions regarding this Bill *here*.

Research Papers can be viewed *here*.

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**ISBN 978-1-78619-022-2**

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