

IS 20 PLENTY FOR LONDON?

With concern over city speed limits increasing, **David Williams** highlights the practical and safe reasons to introduce new zones

COULD it be time for a 20mph limit in London? There's a resurgence of interest in the idea from politicians, local councillors and, more importantly of all, a growing number of residents.

Even motorists seem to be warming to the idea; hardly surprising when you're lucky to get above 20mph in town anyway, and most of us are on both the "giving" and "receiving" ends of traffic.

Interest in my part of London peaked when Rod King – founder of a national campaign called 20's Plenty – gave a talk in our local pub. Very persuasive he was too. He had a raft of statistics showing that by reducing the speed to 20 in a limited zone, or an entire area, there are major benefits, with average journey times barely affected.

Plenty's research shows that lowering residential speeds to 20mph lowers child pedestrian accidents by 70 per cent while leading to more walking and cycling, lower noise and pollution levels, "calmer" driving, less traffic and a "greater sense of community wellbeing".

A study by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, published in the British Medical Journal recently, shows that 20mph zones in London reduced road injuries by more than 40 per cent.

Portsmouth introduced widespread 20mph zones in 2008 and recently said casualties had fallen by 15 per cent – although it's too early to draw firm conclusions. I've driven in the city myself; being kept down to 20 is frustrating at first but you acclimatise and the roads are indeed calmer.

Crucially, however – and this is very



Limits: research shows that 20 zones help reduce accidents and pollution

important if campaigners want to win the motorists over – Portsmouth introduced its scheme without the dreaded road hump, which is what a growing number of regional authorities plan to do too.

The Department for Transport recently built on this with proposals expected to result in councils being allowed to introduce 20mph zones without traffic calming measures.

This should be applauded. Over some 13 or so years covering transport issues in London, I've lost count of the number of local campaigns demanding humps to slow traffic. But I've covered an even greater number calling for humps to be removed on the grounds of noise, vibration, extra exhaust pollution and general nuisance.

Additional problems include vehicles swerving to straddle speed cushions, which can also push cyclists into the middle of the road where they are more vulnerable. Another problem is the

differential in speed that humps cause; most vehicles slow down for them but 4x4s and vans still take them at speed, putting their velocity way above the average and catching out unwary pedestrians.

The way ahead seems clear. Home Office approval was recently given for new speed cameras which are capable of enforcing 20mph zones: cameras, not humps, are the answer, along with police spot checks. We also need a fresh London-wide review, working out how to proceed, led by the London Mayor in conjunction with the boroughs.

It's pointless adding a small 20mph zone here and another there, as such schemes inevitably funnel traffic to other people's roads. The nature of current legislation also means that piecemeal schemes must be backed with traffic calming, whereas wider schemes do not. The latter approach is far less cash-hungry.

There's a final argument from 20's Plenty; they say piecemeal 20mph zones have a dangerous side-effect; after being "trapped" in 20mph zones motorists go even faster than usual when they find themselves back in a 30mph zone, to "make up time". So bad luck if you're living adjacent to a nice, safe 20mph zone.

Perhaps we should go back to an idea proposed by the London Assembly Green Party some years ago and consider blanket 20mph limits across London's residential areas, with arterial roads kept at 30.

It would be quieter and safer and would scarcely affect car journey times. Better still, more people would try cycling, freeing up the roads for those who really need to drive.

■ www.20splentyforum.org.uk.

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