

Roads, Casualties and Public Health

20 mph Saves Lives

A 20's Plenty for Us Press Release – November 2010

20 mph speeds reduce preventable deaths and health inequality said Professor Danny Dorling of the University of Sheffield at the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety's (PACTS) Westminster Lecture.



Dorling, a Human Geographer specialising in how we die, evidenced road death as the greatest avoidable public health epidemic. Once it was open sewers, then tobacco, now roads must be recognised as the nation's major killer and be tackled. Introducing 20 mph is the most cost effective way to improve quality of life in Britain today.

Although total road deaths are falling, deaths from other causes fell faster, making the road toll an increasing proportion. Traffic forms half of external causes of children's and young people's deaths, particularly boys.

Key is how large a contribution road death makes. Yet the threat isn't diminishing, nor are enough Government resources directed to it. Roads imprison affluent children at home, denying them the freedom to move and are the main sites of killing of poorer children. Road deaths should be in the Department of Health's remit. Dorling was "shocked" that the Dept of Transport's Road Safety budget has been cut from a paltry £37m to £17.2m.

The non party political cost of traffic danger needs addressing. A proven intervention exists – lower speeds. 20 mph zones cut deaths by 41.9%, as evidenced in the British Medical Journal by Grundy et al¹.

"Elsewhere in medicine, you'd get honours and funding for such an effective treatment for an epidemic. Yet there's a collective blind spot on the enormous benefits of 20 mph limits - perhaps because Directors of Public Health aren't trained in road safety."

Dorling thinks educating drivers on lower speeds, plus a campaign to get people to ask Local Councils for 20 mph limits is badly needed. Challenging the irresponsible behaviour of a few who speed would both reduce deaths and increase social cohesion by tackling the inequality gap in life expectancy between Kensington and Glasgow of 12.4 years.

"Government can lead on 20 mph. In a time of less money it makes even more sense."

Educated people gave up smoking by themselves before a public ban. Much like proper disposal of sewage, for 20 mph speed limits the authorities must lead on getting the public health benefits. Dorling said

"If British people care about children and have a soul, they'd want 20 mph residential speed limits."

Lecture notes are at http://www.shef.ac.uk/geography/staff/dorling_danny/lectures.html including audio and powerpoint.

For picture – See the map of London's 20 mph zones: http://sasi.group.shef.ac.uk/publications/2010/Dorling_2010_PACTS.ppt

Slide 30, add the caption – London's 20 mph limits - how long till the patchwork joins up?

1. Grundy C et al. Effect of 20 mph traffic speed zones on road injuries in London, 1986-2006: controlled interrupted time series analysis- BMJ 2009; 339:b4469

20's Plenty for Us welcomes comment and feedback. Please contact us if you have or need any further information. www.20splentyforus.org.uk

20's Plenty for Us campaigns for 20 mph speed limits without road calming as the default in towns and residential areas

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