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20's Plenty - For the 2020s

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A few years ago I had the pleasure of speaking at the RSMA annual conference and noticed the strong commitment to making our streets safer. In that I explained how the movement for slower speed limits on community streets was evolving.

The '20's Plenty' (or 'Love 30' as it is known in km/h countries) was making great progress this year even before the Covid-19 pandemic and the realisation that we all needed more space and safety to move around our cities, towns and villages.

In 2019 the First Minister of Wales announced that the Welsh Government was committed to changing the default speed limit for urban/village roads to 20mph. We were delighted to be part of a Task and Finish Group set up by the government to understand all the issues and report back to the minister responsible. The report was presented to the Welsh Parliament (Senedd) in July. During the subsequent debate there was cross-party support to the initiative with 10 times as many Members of Senedd agreeing as disagreeing (44 to 4). Implementation is expected across the country by 2023.

In February 2020, global road safety experts and ministers from 130

countries met in Stockholm at the 3rd Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety and endorsed the Stockholm Declaration which covered many aspects of road safety. On the issue of 'speed management' this resolved that governments would:

*"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".*

This was further presented to and endorsed by the General Assembly of the United Nations in August 2020 as part of the Decade of Action for Road Safety – 2021-2030.

There are also technology changes coming as European countries and manufacturers will be fitting mandatory Intelligent Speed Assistance to all new motor vehicle models from 2022 which will

automatically limit the vehicle speed to the speed limit. Although capable of being over-ridden, it will be a major influence on speed compliance.

Across the country we are also seeing police warming to enforcement of 20mph limits. It is still patchy but more and more Police Chiefs and Police and Crime Commissioners are recognising that enforcement of 20mph limits has an important role in making community streets safer and more secure.

And we are all aware of the raft of measures being implemented by



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Traffic Authorities since Covid-19 to balance our urban streetscape in favour of sustainable and active travel. And now this not only includes walking and cycling, but the presence of e-scooters, e-cargo bikes and many alternatives to the private car.

Already, all of the Inner London boroughs have a 20mph limit on most roads they manage. Over half of the largest 40 urban authorities have set a default 20mph limit. And increasing numbers of counties are setting 20mph on residential roads and shopping streets. With over a third of the UK population now living in local authorities with or about to set a 20mph default, there is wide recognition that a 30mph limit, 'pulled out of the air' in 1934, cannot meet our 21st century transit and movement needs. 30mph limits where motor vehicles mix with people are no longer 'fit for purpose'.

There is also pressure building beyond Wales for the national 30mph limit to be replaced by a 20mph limit with local authorities able to set exceptions. Already local authorities including London, Birmingham, Edinburgh and Glasgow have all requested a national 20mph default. Whilst Westminster and Holyrood are currently pushing-back against such proposals, it is simply not logical to set 20mph limits, authority by authority, across most of our urban streets and treat them as if they were some exception. The national 30mph limit is simply not credible when progressive authorities responding to the central government call to protect and encourage active travel have to fight against a national 30mph limit that is recognised as 'unfit for purpose'.

And this is reflected across the world, where communities are dropping 50km/h (31mph) limits to 30km/h (18.6 mph).

But for the RSMA this is not 'more' of the same 20mph limits that are already being rolled out and have been complemented by 20mph carriageway roundels and markings. It is a complete re-think. Whilst carriageway roundels have played an important role in denoting where

20mph limits apply, the future will be one where instead of 30mph being the norm and we just slow down in a few places, a lower speed limit will be the norm and instead we will speed up only where safe. Where 20mph becomes the default then the need to sign the 30mph exceptions from the norm will be required. At the same time, there is a huge opportunity for road marking lines and signs being used in the default 20mph roads. These may be for constraining lane widths, or re-allocating road space. The use of ubiquitous low-cost zebra crossings without the need for Belisha BSeacons is also being considered where speed limits are lower.

We are also seeing much more of the 'tactical urbanism' that is being used by communities to reshape the 'public areas between buildings' that we call streets. Coloured surfacing can complement pavement planters, street benches, trees and other initiatives to create community spaces that shout 'people' rather than 'motors'. This is often initiated and delivered through NGOs such as Sustrans and Living Streets.

So, my message to RSMA members is that we are seeing a real change throughout the country in that community aspirations for better and safer streets are being aligned with local and national government ambitions for active travel. Speed management is a key element for both of those. There is wide recognition that a general 30mph limit no longer meets the needs of communities or society generally. The times are changing to an era where 20mph will be the norm and we will only speed up in 'special places' where adequate segregated and crossing facilities exist for vulnerable road users. The nature of interventions, lines and surface treatments will change, but road safety markings will continue to be a key element in informing drivers both through specific speed limit signage and more subliminal messaging that indeed 20 is plenty where people live, work, shop, play and learn.

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