

Consultation on examining the speed limit for heavy goods vehicles over 7.5 tonnes on single carriageway roads



Response by Brake, the road safety charity

1 February 2013

About Brake

[Brake](#) is an independent charity working across the UK to make roads safer, prevent road death and injury, and care for victims. Brake carries out research into road users' attitudes and behaviour in relation to road safety, engages schools and communities to spread road safety education, disseminates international research, guidance and case studies to fleet and road safety professionals through its Fleet Safety Forum and Road Safety Forum, and supports communities campaigning for road safety. It is also a national, government-funded provider of specialist support for people bereaved and seriously injured in road crashes, running a national helpline and providing packs that are handed to bereaved families by police following every road death.

For more information contact Ellen Booth, senior campaigns officer, on ebooth@brake.org.uk or 01484 550067.

Summary

Brake opposes proposals to increase HGV speed limits by any margin, on the basis that an increase in the speed limit is likely to mean an increase in the speeds at which HGVs travel, which would be detrimental to road safety and mean more devastating casualties.

We know from a wide range of evidence that managing and reducing traffic speeds is vital to improving road safety and reducing casualties, and protecting vulnerable road users in particular¹. Brake therefore strongly objects to the suggestion that 40mph limits impose 'unnecessary' costs on businesses, because vital safety laws are not unnecessary – they protect lives, prevent terrible suffering, and save both businesses and the wider economy the significant cost of crashes².

Increasing traffic speeds (even by a small margin) has a major negative impact on safety because of drivers' reduced ability to react to hazards and stop in an emergency. Because stopping distances increase exponentially as speed increases, when traffic goes just a few mph faster, it takes drivers much further to stop. A car travelling at 50mph takes 17 metres (more than four car lengths) longer to stop at 50mph than at 40mph³. With HGVs, this is exacerbated due to their size and weight meaning longer stopping distances and greater impact forces. Hence Brake believes it is critical HGVs retain a 40mph limit on derestricted single carriageways, which often contain hidden hazards, can be plagued with bad weather conditions, and often pass through and near to communities that would be badly affected by higher speeds. Brake also points out the lack of evidence that the proposals would reduce overtaking crashes, so no assumptions of safety gains can be made. At the same time, a range of other evidenced (and often low cost) measures can be deployed to

address speed- and over-taking related crashes on these roads.

As an organisation that supports people bereaved and seriously injured in road crashes, we bear witness to the trauma, suffering and upheaval that results. No potential benefit to business or the economy from increasing HGV speeds can outweigh the loss of life it would be expected to cause, and the ensuing devastation to families and communities.

Brake is concerned the government has not undertaken a proper assessment of the safety risks associated with these proposals, and therefore the human and economic costs of increased crashes has not been factored into the analysis. Given the Department for Transport provides comprehensive figures on the costs associated with road crashes⁴, and the risks of speed increases are well understood⁵, Brake argues that this analysis should have been undertaken prior to publishing this consultation. As it stands, Brake is concerned that the likely detrimental impact on road safety has been underplayed within the consultation document.

Brake also argues that the stated aims of these proposals could and should be achieved through other, evidenced means that won't risk causing increased and unnecessary loss of life or injury, and could deliver significant economic and road safety benefits simultaneously. In particular, Brake recommends the government support and fund work within the freight (and wider fleet) industry (such as that delivered by Brake's Fleet Safety Forum) to further develop and promote best practice in road risk management. As is evidenced through Brake's fleet safety award scheme, effective and often straightforward fleet safety interventions and policies can help operators to significantly reduce costs as well as improving safety.

Brake also recommends the government further encourages and supports work by highways authorities to improve speed management, enforcement and safety on single carriageway roads, including measures to deter overtaking and reducing the general speed limit to 50 or 40 or below, especially on riskier stretches.

Q1 Policy option 1: Raise the national speed limit for HGVs over 7.5t from 40 to 50 mph on single carriageway roads. Is this your preferred policy option?

Please explain your answer.

No.

Brake opposes the proposal to increase speed limits for HGVs over 7.5t to 50mph on the basis that such an increase would likely increase the number and severity of HGV crashes and therefore mean more deaths and injuries. It is well documented that increases in vehicle speeds increase the number and severity of crashes⁶.

Brake is concerned this consultation is underplaying the safety impact of increasing the limit. First, an increase in speed of even 1mph increases crash risk and severity significantly⁷, so even if the government's assumption is correct that average speed increases would be within 1-2mph, such an increase would still result in an unacceptable rise in deaths and injuries. Given the appalling suffering that results from road casualties, with each casualty often having a ripple affect across families and communities, Brake believes it is unacceptable to entertain a policy that is highly likely to inflict this outcome on

more people. Brake also points out that these crashes and casualties constitute a significant economic burden due to the human costs and drain on health and emergency services, and costs to businesses whose vehicles are involved⁸. None of these costs have been factored into the government's analysis.

It is also important to note that even if the average speed increase is only 1-2mph, it is still the case that some, and potentially a significant proportion, of HGVs are likely to go much faster than at present, posing a greatly enhanced risk due to greatly increased stopping distances.

As is recognised in the consultation, organisations have an incentive to drive their fleets as fast as possible to maximise efficiency and productivity. The main disincentive against maximising speeds is enforcement. Thus it is reasonable to assume that some organisations will encourage their drivers to drive as fast as possible without risking fines. Current ACPO guidelines say HGV speed limits will be enforced once a vehicle over 7.5t reaches speeds of 46mph and above, and average speeds for such vehicles have remained relatively stable in recent years at 45.5mph, just below the level of enforcement⁹. Under ACPO guidelines, with a 50mph limit, enforcement would begin at 57mph¹⁰. Thus it is reasonable to assume that some businesses will encourage their drivers to travel nearly 10mph faster than the fastest speed the government has allowed for in its modelling. This increase of 10mph would pose a very significant threat to safety, increasing crash risk and causing more avoidable and unacceptable deaths and injuries each year¹¹.

As well as resulting in more families suffering the horror of a road death or injury, it is likely that an increase in HGV speed limits would also bring about serious negative repercussions for the many communities that are situated on or near single carriageway A and B roads. From our experience working with schools and communities campaigning for safer roads, we know that HGV traffic and traffic speeds are prime concerns for many. Many communities already suffer from the danger, pollution and noise associated with fast traffic, which can have a significant impact on health, quality of life and people's ability to use active and sustainable modes of travel. We have no doubt that these proposals will be of grave concern to many communities, and act as an affront to their efforts to try to bring about a safer, greener, more pleasant road environment.

As an additional point, this consultation fails to take into account that a large proportion of the HGV fleet is non-compliant with vehicle maintenance regulations¹², and resources available for enforcing standards are being cut¹³. An increase in speeds would increase the wear and tear on HGVs, bringing about higher maintenance costs and probably more unroadworthy vehicles on the road, and therefore potentially more crashes linked to defects as well.

Q2 Policy option 2: Raise the national speed limit for HGVs over 7.5t from 40 to 45 mph on single carriageway roads. Is this your preferred policy option? Please explain your answer.

No.

Brake opposes any increase in HGV speed limits because any increase in the speed limit is likely to increase vehicle speeds, at least for some vehicles some of the time, even if

average speeds are only marginally changed. As stated above, even a slight increase in speed of 1mph has a significant impact on stopping distances (particularly for large, heavy vehicles) and therefore on the risk posed and the number of crashes and casualties.

As stated above, the evidence suggests HGVs are driven on average just below the current speed enforcement threshold as the highest possible speed where enforcement penalties can be avoided. An increase in the limit to 45mph would mean an enforcement threshold of 52mph. A corresponding increase in speeds would mean a marked increase in crashes, deaths, and injuries.

Q3 Do you consider there to be any additional policy options, or variants of policy options 1 and 2? If so, please explain fully and provide any evidence you may have.

For example, only increasing the speed limit for HGVs over 7.5t on single carriageways where the national speed limit applies, and retaining the 40 mph limit at other times

Brake believes it is critical the 40mph remains in place for HGVs over 7.5t: an option not specifically included in this consultation. At the same time, Brake recommends the government step up work to improve speed management and enforcement and prevent risky overtaking on derestricted single carriageways to improve safety for all road users and prevent devastating and costing crashes.

Currently, road users of all types are more than one and a half times more likely to be killed on a rural A or B road than on an urban road of the same classes¹⁴. Many such roads are narrow carriageways with blind corners and bends; have no pavements or cycle paths, have pot holes and debris such as fallen branches (meaning cyclists and motorcyclists have to veer); and suffer from wet and icy conditions, meaning it takes far longer to stop. For this reason, Brake recommends the national speed limit on such roads should be reduced for all vehicles from 60mph to 50mph, retaining the lower 40mph limit for HGVs over 7.5t, and with lower limits where particular risks exist. In the meantime, while the national speed limit remains, Brake recommends the government supports and encourages work by highways authorities to lower limits and implement other safety measures on as widespread a basis as possible, particularly targeting higher-risk roads.

Such a decrease in speed limits, combined with public education on the dangers of speed and overtaking and effective enforcement, would be expected to help to reduce crash frequency and severity through decreasing upper speeds¹⁵, but also would likely help to reduce 'platooning' behind HGVs and therefore the temptation to overtake by reducing the speed differential between vehicle types.

Reducing speed limits can also help to improve traffic flow and ease congestion¹⁶. This improved flow has concomitant benefits in the form of lower pollution, less noise¹⁷, and a more pleasant road environment conducive to environmentally- and health-friendly active travel.

Brake also recommends the government step up work to support and assist the freight industry to improve safety and reduce costs through improved risk management, as outlined further below.

Q4 In your opinion does the current 40 mph speed limit cause any of the following: unnecessary costs to vehicle operators; congestion; avoidable overtaking collisions; an uneven playing field for businesses; or anything not mentioned in this list? Please explain your answer and provide any evidence you may have.

Brake objects to the consultation's implicit assumption that 40mph limits for HGVs are inherently problematic. Specifically, Brake reminds the government that 40mph limits do not impose 'unnecessary' costs on businesses as vital safety laws are not unnecessary – they protect lives, prevent terrible suffering, and save both businesses and the wider economy the significant cost of crashes¹⁸.

We, along with the government, would like to see a decrease in the number of overtaking crashes involving road users of all kinds, but the proposals outlined here are not an evidenced (or we believe likely) way to achieve this. Combined education and enforcement programmes on road safety issues, for example to increase seatbelt use and decrease drink-driving, have been highly successful in the past and Brake advises the government to follow a similar policy to decrease risky overtaking. There are also a range of road engineering measures, some relatively low-cost, that can be utilised to deter and prevent risky overtaking at key blackspots, such as markings and signage. Brake would also highlight that lowering limits on derestricted single carriageways, as recommended above, is an evidenced way to reduce crashes and casualties¹⁹.

Brake disputes the idea that the 40mph limit creates an uneven playing field. The consultation document states that the government and ACPO do not see enforcing HGV speed limits as a priority, leading to a situation where those who choose to break the law can escape punishment. Where vital safety laws are concerned, the playing field is made level for those who comply by punishing those who don't. It is therefore not the limit which causes unfairness but a lack of enforcement and inappropriately low fines. Brake recommends higher levels of enforcement activity alongside increased fines for speeding and other risky road traffic offences. This will help to pose a suitable deterrent and is in line with the devastation these crimes can result in. This would also create a fairer operating environment for freight operators.

Brake highlights that the current 40mph limit prevents the heaviest vehicles on our roads from posing an even more significant risk to everyone who uses the network. It is not acceptable to ask people to pay with their lives in order that businesses might be able to make time savings.

Q5 We welcome views from HGV operators and trade associations about whether they feel the balance of savings and costs of extra speed detailed in the Impact Assessment reflects their own experience or expectations?

Since its inception Brake has been working with fleets to help them manage road risk and improve safety through its Fleet Safety Forum. In this capacity, by sharing and promoting best practice, we have helped many businesses very significantly bring down their costs through reduced crashes, bumps, scrapes, less vehicle and staff downtime, and lower insurance premiums. Our extensive catalogue of good practice case studies based on our fleet safety award winners shows the huge savings that can be brought about through often simple improvements in practices and policies. We also understand the huge and

often hidden costs that many fleet operators continue to bear as a result of poor safety management.

We therefore recommend the government could achieve its aim of lowering costs for freight operators, in a way that is evidenced and simultaneously benefits road safety for all, by instead supporting the further development of road risk management within the industry: saving money for business and saving lives.

This consultation document does not consider probable increases in insurance and other costs to business due to the more and more severe collisions likely to occur if higher limits are implemented. The analysis simply assumes any reductions in operating costs will be higher than additional costs from increased fuel consumption, increased insurance costs, and increased costs associated with crashes. This assumption is unsatisfactory. The analysis also does not take into account added burden on employees of road freight firms who could potentially be expected to drive further and reach destinations faster due to limit changes. Such pressure could potentially lead to driver stress, fatigue and further risks.

Q6 If the speed limit for HGVs over 7.5t is not raised on these roads, collisions as a result of 'platooning' could continue. If it is, the frequency of collisions could decrease due to a reduction in 'platooning', though on the other hand the severity of collisions could increase.

Do you have any opinion or evidence on the effect of 'platooning' on road safety, or on the frequency or severity of collisions involving HGVs on single carriageway roads and what effect an increase in their maximum speed limit on these roads would have on safety? If so, please provide it in response to Q. 6.

Brake objects to the wording of Q6, which is suggestive that overtaking crashes currently occur as a result of HGV's present 40mph speed limit: something that is not evidenced. Overtaking crashes are of great concern to Brake, but Brake points out that this is a far wider problem involving overtaking vehicles of all types, not only HGVs. It is also a problem that Brake believes would not be addressed by increasing the speed limit of HGVs, and indeed this could make the situation worse, since there would remain a differential between the top speeds of HGVs and other vehicles, but overtaking a vehicle travelling at 45mph or 50mph is inherently more dangerous than overtaking one travelling at 40mph.

As referenced above, there are a range of evidenced methods to address speed- and overtaking-related crashes and reduce crash and casualty rates on restricted single carriageway roads, including simple low-cost engineering measures, improved enforcement, and lowering of limits²⁰. Brake recommends these measures are stepped up, alongside publicity work to warn drivers of the acute risks involved in overtaking and the fact that this risky manoeuvre should be avoided.

Q9 What impacts, if any, do you think there will be to the following if an increased speed limit for HGVs over 7.5t on single carriageway roads is introduced?

a) Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAS). Local authorities may have specific evidence on the effect on AQMAS in their authority;

b) EU air quality standards

c) Noise levels;

d) Areas currently identified as noise hotspots

Brake is concerned that increasing HGV speed limits will increase both air and noise pollution, having a negative impact on communities in close proximity to these roads.

HGVs travelling at 50mph can use more than 50% more fuel than the same vehicle travelling at 40mph, generating far more greenhouse gas emissions²¹. Road freight currently accounts for 92% of UK greenhouse gas emissions from freight, while transporting only 66% of the freight moved in the UK by weight²². If increasing the HGV speed limit also encourages a modal shift from water or rail to road freight, emissions will increase still further as firms move away from relatively greener logistics options towards fuel-intensive and more polluting forms of transport.

Similarly, increasing the speed and potentially the volume of HGVs, particularly through communities, is likely to increase noise levels²³. Both these issues are clearly of concern many communities, with many of the groups Brake engages with having highlighted their concerns around HGVs travelling through towns and villages affecting local quality of life through noise and air pollution as well as the threat to safety. Any in HGV speeds is likely to make these problems worse.

Q12 Do you think that all of the potential health and social costs of the policy options have been considered in the Impact Assessment? Please provide details if you think costs have not been included.

No.

The government has undertaken no adequate modelling of road safety costs either human or financial, including emergency service costs to respond to crashes, costs to the NHS of treating victims, support costs for the victims of HGV crashes, social security requirements of bereaved or seriously injured victims. This is a significant oversight and such analysis should be undertaken before any more consideration can be given to these proposals. After-the-fact analysis of costs associated with the policy is not acceptable when people's lives are at stake.

Further, the government has not examined the consequences for communities living on or near single carriageway A and B roads which will likely see an increase in HGV traffic and speeds, potentially impacting on their safety, health and quality of life.

Q13 Do you believe an increase in speed for this class of vehicle on these roads will cause more HGVs over 7.5t to use single carriageway roads, which do not currently?

Potentially.

The increase in legal speeds may encourage businesses to use 'short cuts' away from dual carriageway traffic to reach destinations faster, potentially taking them through villages and towns. These shifts could potentially have a huge impacts on towns and villages struggling with through-traffic.

People have a right to be and feel safe from vehicles in their local area, which is why we campaign for speed limit reductions in towns and villages across the UK. Slower speeds encourage people to shift from driving to cycling and walking²⁴, keeping them healthy and protecting the environment. Conversely, an increase in the volume and speed of HGVs travelling through communities on single-carriageway roads will make cycling and walking less pleasant and more dangerous, encouraging people into their cars and increasing congestion, pollution, and inactivity, or even prevent the most vulnerable people from getting out altogether. As stated above, the government has not considered the wider ramifications of the proposed speed increase on those vulnerable groups most likely to be affected by it, and the costs to these groups would be unbearable.

Q14 Do you think some freight may switch from rail or water to HGVs, if the speed limit is increased on these roads for these vehicles?

Potentially.

If there is a decrease in costs to businesses of running road freight and faster journey times it might encourage a switch from rail or water freight to road freight. This would likely increase congestion and risk on the roads. Clearly, an increase in congestion could negate any journey time benefits that might be associated with an increase in the speed limit.

Q15 Do you think that there may be added wear and tear on these roads if the speed limit is increased for these vehicles? Local authorities may have specific comments or evidence, with regard to roads in their authority.

Yes.

Any increased wear and tear on roads will increase dangers for all road users at a time when local authorities' ability to find funds to adequately maintain road surfaces and safety engineering is already under strain.

Q16 Local authorities have powers to alter speed limits on the local road network, including non-trunk primary routes, in line with guidance set out in Setting Local Speed Limits, DfT Circular 1/06. Do you think that the increase in the national speed limit for HGVs over 7.5t on single carriageways, would make it more likely that local authorities would introduce more local speed restrictions, and if so on which roads?

Possibly

Local governments are being encouraged to respond to local community concerns over speed²⁵, and an increase in fast-moving HGVs travelling through towns and villages is likely to lead to an increase in requests for lower speed limits and other safety measures to protect local people, especially people on foot and bicycle. As stated above, many communities wishing to campaign for safer roads report traffic speed as a key concern, and many also flag up HGV traffic as a specific issue. As outlined above, faster HGV traffic will pose additional risks for communities, as well as increased pollution and noise, so it seems highly likely that more communities will raise these concerns and call on their local authorities to address them, work which Brake will continue to support.

-
- ¹ For example: The effects of drivers' speed on the frequency of road accidents, Transport Research Laboratory, 2011
- ² Reported road casualties Great Britain annual reports 2011, Department for Transport, 2012
- ³ Highway Code
- ⁴ Reported Road Casualties Great Britain 2011, Department for Transport, 2012
- ⁵ New Directions in Speed Management: A Review of Policy, Department for Transport, 2000
- ⁶ Taylor, Lynam and Baruna, *The effect of drivers' speed on the frequency of road accidents*, TRL, 2000
- ⁷ New Directions in Speed Management: A Review of Policy, Department for Transport, 2000
- ⁸ Reported road casualties annual report 2011, Department for Transport, 2012
- ⁹ *HGV speed limit increase evaluation: final report* TRL, 2009
- ¹⁰ *Road Traffic Offences, Guidance on Fixed Penalty Notices*, CPS, 2012
- ¹¹ The effects of drivers' speed on the frequency of road accidents, Transport Research Laboratory, 2011
- ¹² For example, a full 25.5% of HGVs tested in 2010-2011 failed their initial annual test, and 14.8% failed the final test. VOSA Effectiveness Report 2010-11, VOSA 2012
- ¹³ VOSA Annual Report 2010-11, VOSA, 2012
- ¹⁴ Reported Road Casualties Great Britain 2011, Department for Transport, 2012
- ¹⁵ For example: The effects of drivers' speed on the frequency of road accidents, Transport Research Laboratory, 2011
- ¹⁶ New Directions in Speed Management: A Review of Policy, Department for Transport, 2000
- ¹⁷ Environmental effects of 30 km/h in urban areas – with regard to exhaust emissions and noise, The Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute, 1999
- ¹⁸ Reported Road Casualties Great Britain 2011, Department for Transport, 2012
- ¹⁹ Simple measures save lives, Road Safety Foundation, 2011
- ²⁰ *ibid*
- ²¹ BTAC/IRTE technical trials of June 2000
- ²² UK Transport Greenhouse Gas Emissions Factsheet, Department for Transport, 2011
- ²³ Calculation of Road Traffic Noise, Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1998
- ²⁴ An evaluation of the health effects of a neighbourhood traffic calming scheme, Greater Glasgow NHS Board 2004
- ²⁵ SETTING LOCAL SPEED LIMITS, Department for Transport Circular 01/2013