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Your Ref: TACE/SAS/LM

Dear Madam,

04 SEP 2012

A690 Gillesgate Roundabout to Carrville Interchange
Proposed Speed Limit Reduction

I refer your letter dated 24th July, 2012, and accompanying Plan, relative to the proposed change of speed limit from 70mph to 50mph on that section of A690 road from Gillesgate Roundabout to Carrville Interchange highlighted on your plan which appears to be proposed to be achieved through a change of signs alone with no additional engineering features.

Having considered the proposed 50mph Speed Limit on that section of route identified above, I would like to take this opportunity to offer the following comments.

To date the main guidance in setting speed limits, which has been supported by both the Police and Durham County Council, is the County Durham and Darlington Speed Management Strategy. In the Strategy the basis of determining speed limits is in line with the current Government Guidance published on setting speed limits (DFT Circular 01/2006). Given this, any change to speed limits should be determined with the guidance in mind and therefore the following should be considered in this case.

Pg2 Para2 indicates, *"Effective speed management involves many components designed to work together to encourage, help and require road users to adopt appropriate and safe speeds. Speed limits play a fundamental role. They are a key source of information to road users, particularly an indicator of the nature and risks posed by that road to both themselves and other motorised and non-motorised road users. **Speed limits should, therefore, be evidence-led, self-explaining and seek to reinforce people's assessment of what is a safe speed to travel.** They should also encourage self-compliance and not be seen by drivers as being a target speed to drive in all circumstances"*.

The guidance also indicates (Pg7 Para 21) *"Speed Limits are, however, only one element of speed management. **Local speed limits should not be set in isolation. They should be part of a package with other measures to manage speeds which includes engineering and landscaping standards that respect the needs of all road users and raise driver awareness of their environment, together with education, driver information, training and publicity. Within their overall network management responsibilities, these measures should enable traffic authorities to deliver speed limits and driven speeds that are safe and appropriate for the road and its surroundings, as well as help drivers to be more readily aware of the road environment and assess their own appropriate speeds at all times"***

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Para 22 outlines ***“Indeed, if a speed limit is set in isolation, or is unrealistically low, it is likely to be ineffective and lead to disrespect for the speed limit. As well as requiring significant, and avoidable, enforcement costs, this may also result in substantial numbers of drivers continuing to travel at unacceptable speeds, thus increasing the risk of collisions and injuries.”***

The underlying principles indicate that:

Para 29 ***“The underlying aim of speed management policies should be to achieve a “safe” distribution of speeds that reflects the function of the road and the impacts on the local community. This should imply a mean speed appropriate to the prevailing conditions, and all vehicles moving at speeds as close to the posted speed limit as practicable”.***

Para 30 ***“As well as being a key indicator of whether a local speed limit is appropriate, the estimated collision and injury savings should also be an important factor when considering changes to a local speed limit”.***

Para 31 ***“ A key factor when setting a speed limit is what the road looks like to the road users, such as its geometry and adjacent land use. Drivers are likely to expect and respect lower limits, and be influenced when deciding on what is appropriate speed, where they can see potential hazards, for example outside schools, in residential areas or villages and in shopping streets”.***

Para 32 indicates that ***“A principle aim in determining appropriate speed limits should, therefore, be to provide a consistent message between the road geometry and environment, and for changes in speed limit to be reflective of changes in the road layout and characteristics. The following will be important factors when considering what is an appropriate speed limit:***

- road function (strategic, through traffic, local access etc.),
- road geometry (width, sightlines, bends, junctions and accesses etc.),
- road environment (rural, residential, shop frontages, schools etc.),
- level of adjacent development, and
- traffic composition (including existing and potential levels of cycle usage).

Page 22 indicates that ***“Rural dual carriageways with segregated junctions and facilities for vulnerable road users would generally be suitable for 70mph limits. However, a lower limit may be appropriate if, for example, an accident history indicates that this cannot be achieved safely”.***

The A690 Route

The A690 road along its length between Gilesgate and Carrville is a derestricted dual carriageway with central grassed reserve subject of wire rope safety fencing and only one vehicle central crossover point at its north eastern end. Within the proposed 50mph speed limit area, on the north eastbound carriageway there are only 3 vehicle access points onto the A690 (1 serving a private business, 1 being a grade separated interchange and 1 leading to a small residential area and Motorway Compound). On the south westbound side there are only 2 vehicle access points (1 being a grade separated Interchange and 1 being a slip road just prior to Gilesgate roundabout) and in addition a layby facility is located just northeast of the grade separated interchange. A dedicated part-time bus lane operates on the south westbound carriageway between Belmont and Gilesgate roundabout. Other than a crossing point used by pedestrians near the first vehicle access on the north eastbound

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carriageway there are no other at grade pedestrian crossing points. There are no footpaths either side of the road or other facilities to encourage pedestrian movement along the route. A purpose built pedestrian over-bridge is located across both carriageways near to Station Lane junction.

There is no frontage development along the entire route proposed for a lower speed limit. Development on the south east side is set well back from the A690 road and in the main out of sight. The main areas of land immediately bordering each side of the route are verge, tree and hedge lined. In addition, the A690 road forms a major east/west route through County Durham and it accesses its principle area of Durham City.

Overall the main characteristics of the road are that of a **strategic rural dual carriageway**.

Within the guidance set out in Circular 01/2006, (para 110) it states that ***“Rural Dual Carriageways are not covered by the speed assessment framework. Roads with segregated junctions and facilities for vulnerable road users would generally be suitable for 70mph limits. However, a lower limit may be appropriate if, for example, an accident history indicates this cannot be achieved safely”***.

Accident Record

The injury accident record for the route between Gilesgate roundabout and Carrville Interchange has been considered and it is noted that between 1st January, 2009 and 31st July, 2012, there have been a total of 2 Fatal and 9 Slight injury accidents recorded in this period. A breakdown of the route indicates:

North Eastbound Carriageway (toward Carrville)

1 Fatal, 4 Slight
 No accidents involved excess speed
 1 accident involved a pedestrian
 1 accident involved collision with a deer
 1 accident involved collision when moving lanes
 2 accidents involved collision while vehicle stationary or moving off from stationary position

South Westbound Carriageway (toward Durham)

1 Fatal, 5 Slight
 1 accident involved excess speed
 1 accident involved pedestrian (under influence alcohol – walking down middle of road in dark with dark clothing)
 2 accidents involved collision when moving lanes
 1 accident involved a rear end shunt
 1 accident occurred after passenger applied handbrake
 1 accident occurred after drifting across road, panicking and overcorrecting

Overall only one accident has involved excess speed as a causation factor and while two fatal accidents tragically involved a pedestrian, they were in the main due to pedestrian error.

Speed Data

The speed data provided by from the loop sites on A690 has also been considered.

The survey undertaken on the north eastbound carriageway (away from Durham) between 23rd and 30th July, 2012, gives a **mean speed of 60mph**. It should also be noted that on average **81%** of the existing traffic flow travels at speeds **above 50m.p.h.**, **58%** of vehicles falling **within our enforcement threshold**.

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The survey undertaken on the south westbound carriageway (towards Durham) between 23rd and 30th July, 2012, gives a **mean speed of 55mph**. It should also be noted that on average **69%** of the existing traffic flow travels at speeds **above 50m.p.h.**, **44%** of vehicles falling **within our enforcement threshold**.

Pg 11 Para37 indicates, ".....***The aim should be to align the local speed limit so that the original mean speed driven on the road is AT OR BELOW the new posted speed limit for that road.***" (This is clearly not the case in this instance)

Pg44 Para10 indicates "***The aim should be to align the speed limit to the prevailing conditions, and all vehicles moving at speed as close to the posted speed limit as possible. An important step in the procedure is to gain agreement with local enforcement agencies that the mean speed of drivers on the road with any new speed limits is acceptable***"

It is also the view that we have to be mindful that lower speeds could lead to more continuous streams of traffic with less gaps for pedestrians to safely cross the road particularly at peak traffic times. Given this a lower speed limit is likely to increase the danger to pedestrians who use the at grade crossing point as available gaps to cross are reduced.

Conclusion

In accordance with Circular 01/2006, the characteristics required for a lower speed limit is in our view not achieved. To reduce the limit on this section of A690 with signs alone and no other physical changes, as there is a high level of vehicles exceeding the proposed limit, as well as being against the principles set down in Circular 01/06, will from an enforcement point of view create an enforcement burden the Police will not be able to sustain, as a 24 hour presence to secure a level of reasonable compliance with the new limit is impractical, therefore widespread contravention is likely to be a feature. Enforcement considerations as outlined in Para 22 should be considered in making a decision.

Given this, it is the overall view that the route does not meet the necessary criteria for a lower speed limit and a 70mph speed limit should be retained.

This said, should the level of community concern in this matter, which needs to be seriously considered, be such that a lower speed limit is the overall preferred option, then no direct objection to this proposal will be raised by the Police.

Should the imposition of a lower speed limit be the outcome of the ongoing consultation, it is requested that serious consideration be given to introducing enhanced speed limit signs and speed limit roundels at appropriate locations along the route to ensure as far as practicable that drivers are fully aware of the lower speed limit in an attempt to encourage maximum compliance.

Further should the reduction in speed limit be progressed this will mean that there will be a short section of derestricted road between two 50mph speed limits i.e. Carrville Interchange. It is requested that for consistency liaison is undertaken by the County Council with the Highways Agency in an attempt to reduce this short section of road to 50mph as well and therefore creating a continuous length of 50mph speed limit between Gilesgate and West Rainton. Also as the plan provided stops short of the Highway Agency area of responsibility, the short section between the end of the restriction shown on the plan and commencement of the Highway Agency road should be included in the County Councils Order.

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In closing, should you wish to discuss any aspect of the above please do not hesitate to contact me at your convenience.

Yours sincerely



Traffic Management Officer

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