

20 mph speed limit has worked to reduce collisions on city streets

Researchers at the University of St Andrews say that the number of road traffic collisions (RTCs) in Edinburgh has decreased since the 20mph speed limit was introduced in 2016 under then Transport Convener, former councillor Lesley Hinds.

Dr Valentin Popov of the School of Mathematics and Statistics at the University of St Andrews with collaborators from the universities of Edinburgh, East Anglia and Cambridge introduced a cutting-edge methodology to identify shifts in the trend of RTCs and associate them with possible causes.

The research team investigated the effect of the policy on a city-wide scale, implicitly including spill-over effects.

Published in [*Environment and Planning B*](#), the research found that around the time of the introduction of the 20mph policy in Edinburgh, the trend transitioned from a “slow-decreasing” state to a “fast- decreasing” state.



Cllr Lesley Hinds when the 20 mph zone phase 2 was being introduced

The research provided compelling evidence that a structural change occurred leading to a further decline in the rates of

RTCs, which can be associated with introduction of the 20mph speed limit. Dr Popov and collaborators are careful to note that they are not arguing for causality and that the decline may be due to a cultural shift rather than directly attributable only to the introduction of the new lower limit.

The research found that the average number of RTCs per month in Edinburgh in 1997 was 165, while in 2018 this number fell to 64. In 2016, the year when the new lower speed limit was introduced, the average RTCs per month was just above 95.

Dr Popov said: “We have reasons to believe that the 20mph policy was effective, at least in the short-term. This shows that 20mph limits are worth considering in cities where there is a concerted will to reduce RTCs and make roads safer for users.”

Edinburgh Council Leader, Cllr Adam McVey, said: “I strongly welcome the research findings showing our policy of a 20mph rollout in Edinburgh has resulted in significantly fewer accidents. We know these changes are extremely popular in our communities with residents reporting that they’re more willing to let their kids walk or cycle to school as a result of them feeling safer. Every fatality is a tragedy. One death on our roads is one too many and we are driving forward further policies to make our streets safer for those walking, wheeling and cycling around the Capital.

While this research vindicates our approach, it also conclusively rebuts the opposition of these measures from the right wing Tories – who continue to oppose road safety measures in Edinburgh. I hope this empirical evidence will lead those reactionary Councillors to reconsider, learn from their mistakes and start putting the safety of our residents first.”

As part of the research, the team also noted a seasonal pattern, which indicated an RTC peak in the autumn and a

trough at the start of the year. There is an isolated peak in August which can be attributed to the major arts festival occurring, prior to the pandemic, at that time of the year in Edinburgh.

The United Kingdom's Department for Transport reported that in the 12 months up to September 2018, there were 27,295 people killed or seriously injured on British roads.

Although deaths and injuries on the road have been declining locally and nationally (170,993 casualties in 2017 compared to 160,597 in 2018), as a preventable cause of death and disability, RTCs remain an important policy priority.