

West Lothian streets set to see a return to 20mph zones

West Lothian streets are set to see a return to 20mph zones first introduced under the Spaces for People programme set up during the lockdown.

Residential and town centre streets which figure high in accident statistics would be among the first to have the new speed limits.

Roads officers promised greater consultation with the public over the new zones, while those streets chosen will have an 18-month temporary restriction before the new speed limit is made permanent.

And questions were raised over how the new limits would be enforced.

A report to the council's Environment and Sustainability PDSP described Transport Scotland's National Strategy for 20mph speed limits on appropriate urban and residential roads.

The national transport agency has a country-wide policy to introduce 20mph limits - "Slower today for a safer tomorrow" - making streets feel safer and encouraging active travel.

It is for each local council to determine which local roads in their area should be subject to a new 20mph limit. It also gives councils the flexibility and decision-making responsibilities to decide how best to implement this by way of temporary and permanent Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs)

made under Section 84 of the Traffic Regulation Act 1984.

The plan is to introduce the new zones in three tiers: –

Tier 1: Livingston (including Polbeth and West Calder) and Bathgate and Blackburn.

Tier 2: Locations, Broxburn and Uphall; Linlithgow; Armadale; and Whitburn.

Tier 3: Locations all other remaining settlements.

A report to committee outlined: “A review of the 586 residential areas considered under the 2024/25 Accident Investigation and Prevention Programme shows that this tackles the areas with most residential casualties first.”

Kenneth Brown, Roads Network Manager, told councillors: “This is currently being introduced by local authorities across the country. There are 21 local authorities in Scotland that have already commenced this process, rolling out to their local network.”.

Conservative Alison Adamson asked: “Just to confirm. This is coming from Transport Scotland and will be funded by Transport Scotland until the end of 2025. Is that right?”

Mr Brown confirmed that, to which Councillor Adamson replied: “That’s fine. It’s not just something that the council has cooked up to annoy local motorists – if you read social media.”

Councillor Adamson asked: “If an area is designated as 20mph and the community is not happy about it can it be removed later on?”

Mr Brown said the proposed 20mph zones would be subject to a final review after the temporary traffic orders had been installed.

He added: "The proposals of engaging with communities will go along with that. We'll be asking for feedback before we introduce the final traffic regulation orders."

Pippa Plevin, representing the Joint Forum of Community Councils, told the meeting that many small villages had wanted to retain the 20mph zones installed during the 18-month Spaces for People programme. She asked why they could not be included in the first tier.

Mr Brown said the zones would go to areas where more people could benefit.

Scottish Government research shows that a pedestrian hit by a car travelling at 20mph has a 90% chance of surviving. At 30mph the chance of survival drops to 60%

Ms Plevin also pointed out that the 20mph zones introduced during the pandemic had been difficult to enforce. She suggested that the new zones would face the same issue. "The police have already said they don't have the resources to do that." Mr Brown said: "The police will remain responsible for moving traffic offences, We have not been given any power from Transport Scotland on that."

"It didn't work during the Pandemic, If you are not going to make any changes how is it going to work this time?" asked Ms Plevin.

Chair of the committee Councillor Tom Conn said: "I think that's more a comment than a question. Whether they enforce it or not is not a matter for us. We are required to carry out the policy, not the enforcement."

Gordon Brown said: "One of the things we did learn from the rollout during Covid was the number of signs that we put out to show people the speed limit. When we go through the statutory process we can put repeater signage up so it will be more obvious of the speed limit."

Councillors across the chamber gave cautious welcome to the proposals. Plans for the new zones will go before all nine council local area committees for consultation with local councillors.

Councillor Conn said that the key word in the papers was “appropriate” and that 20mph zones would only be introduced in areas where it was deemed appropriate for safety.

By Stuart Sommerville Local Democracy Reporter