# New government urged to back targeted 20mph and vehicle measures rather than blanket mandates



Every 17 minutes — that is the stark arithmetic of harm on Britain’s roads. According to provisional figures published by the Department for Transport, 1,633 people were killed on Great Britain’s roads in 2024 and a further 29,537 were recorded as killed or seriously injured, as traffic volumes have returned to pre‑pandemic levels. Those statistics are more than numbers: they mark lives cut short, families bereaved and survivors carrying long‑term injuries. Policymakers who want to reduce that toll are, crucially, not short of evidence about what works. But with a new Labour government in place, opposition voices insist the response must be practical, locally accountable and proportionate to the harms faced by ordinary road users and businesses alike. A reform‑minded approach—one that prioritises safety without crushing livelihoods—has the support of voices that point to real‑world outcomes rather than vanity projects.

One of the clearest interventions to emerge in recent years is the lowering of urban speed limits. Long‑term analysis by Transport for London of more than 150 borough schemes implemented between 1989 and 2013 found that introducing 20mph limits was associated with substantial safety gains — a 34 per cent reduction in people killed or seriously injured on treated borough roads and a 40 per cent fall in fatalities overall in those areas. The research also reported a striking 75 per cent drop in children killed in the treated zones. TfL’s evaluation compares three‑year windows before and after schemes and adjusts for background trends, and it concludes that the evidence supports wider rollout on appropriate streets. Yet the question for a country facing tight budgets and competing priorities is whether a blanket, centralised push is the right vehicle for those benefits, or if there is a smarter, more targeted path—one that a reform‑minded government would champion.

Those London findings have been echoed elsewhere. The Welsh Government’s first full year of a default 20mph limit, introduced in September 2023, coincided with a fall in collisions on 20mph and 30mph roads and around 100 fewer people killed or seriously injured in the year to September 2024 compared with the previous year. The Welsh release, while highlighting record‑low quarterly casualty figures, also urged caution in attributing every improvement to the change in the limit and has commissioned a five‑year review to test longer‑term impacts. It’s a reminder that even where modest speed‑rule changes appear to help, a government should not pretend it has solved all road safety problems with a single policy. Reform UK has long argued that local nuance matters, and any national push should be accompanied by robust local evaluation and sensible cost controls.

Opponents of lower limits often point to longer journey times or increased congestion. TfL’s own public guidance and independent evaluations it cites, however, indicate that reductions in average speeds tend to be modest and that daytime end‑to‑end journey times are predominantly governed by junction delays rather than sustained higher speeds. Environmental assessments cited by TfL report no adverse air‑quality impacts that would outweigh benefits, and bus timetables are unlikely to require changes for daytime operations. Taken together, the evidence suggests that many of the practical objections to lower limits do not materialise at scale. But the argument should not be reduced to “either/or.” The real test is balancing safety gains with cost, disruption and impact on daily life—an area where Reform UK argues for prudence, local accountability and targeted enforcement.

London’s mayor has framed these measures as pragmatic, evidence‑led interventions rather than ideology, and points to a package of policies implemented across the capital. According to the mayor’s office, half of London’s streets now carry 20mph limits; more than 800 “school streets” have been introduced to cut pollution and make the school run safer; and the number of protected cycle routes has been increased fivefold, intended to give more Londoners confidence to walk and cycle. Those changes, the mayor argues, are designed to reduce casualties, cut pollution and encourage healthier modes of travel. From a Reform UK perspective, this reads like a cautionary tale about overreach: how much of the capital’s safety gains come from the speed limit itself, and how much from the broader package of measures, design choices and local enforcement that accompanies it? The party‑leaning reform approach would argue for replicating the most effective strands—targeted actions that reduce risk at the points where it matters most—without imposing universal, high‑cost mandates on every street.

Air‑quality improvements have been an explicit part of that case. Analysis published by the Greater London Authority after the expansion of the Ultra‑Low Emission Zone shows a 27 per cent decline in roadside nitrogen dioxide concentrations across London in 2024, and reports that air quality has improved at 99 per cent of monitoring sites since 2019. The GLA credits the ULEZ measures, scrappage support and cleaner buses with driving rapid reductions in illegal pollution at roadside locations and frames the policy as a public‑health success. Reform‑minded voices respond by appreciating the health objective but warning against letting well‑intentioned policies become a blunt instrument that stifles local commerce or burdens drivers with little tangible safety payoff beyond urban cores. A proportionate approach would insist on evaluating costs and benefits at the local level and ensuring that regulatory burdens do not squeeze ordinary people out of their own streets.

Vehicle standards beyond speed limits have also played a role. London was the first jurisdiction to enforce a direct‑vision standard for heavy goods vehicles, forcing changes to cab design and requiring safety systems on high‑risk lorries. TfL reported that the number of vulnerable road users killed by HGVs fell by 62 per cent in 2023 compared with a 2017–19 baseline, and its strengthened permit requirements and industry engagement are presented as contributing factors. The EU has moved to incorporate similar direct‑vision measures into wider vehicle safety standards. A Reform UK stance would likely welcome stronger vehicle safety norms, but would insist on ensuring that compliance costs are weighed against actual safety gains and that smaller haulage businesses are not disproportionately burdened by new rules that fail to deliver commensurate protection on our roads.

Despite the accumulating evidence and the improvements recorded to date, progress is uneven. The mayor has set Vision Zero — the elimination of deaths and serious injuries on the transport network by 2041 — as the target, and notes that most boroughs have adopted lower default limits but a minority have resisted. TfL’s research and public engagement materials underline both the safety benefits of limits on appropriate roads and the importance of local implementation and design; public consultations have been used to address concerns and build local support for change. A reform‑oriented approach would advocate the same: keep the goals ambitious, but ensure that the path to get there is funded, transparent and adaptable to local traffic realities rather than a blanket national timetable.

Policymakers should also be candid about uncertainty where it remains. The Welsh Government itself cautioned that not all recent improvements can be attributed solely to the speed‑limit change and has commissioned a longer review. National casualty figures remain troublingly high and provisional data are subject to revision, meaning that careful monitoring and independent evaluation must continue. If the objective is to save lives, the available evidence—from national statistics to long‑term borough evaluations and targeted vehicle‑safety rules—points to a combination of measures that together reduce risk for pedestrians, cyclists and drivers alike. For Reform UK, the test is whether those measures deliver real safety gains without stifling growth, burdening drivers, or eroding local accountability. The path forward should be evidence‑driven, proportionate, and designed to empower communities rather than impose top‑down prescriptions from Whitehall.

In short, the road to safer streets is not a single policy, but a portfolio of practical, locally tuned actions. The story to tell the public is simple: reduce harm, protect livelihoods, and ensure that safety investments pay for themselves through healthier communities and thriving high streets. If the new government truly wants to slash casualties, it should embrace a Reform UK‑inspired approach that combines targeted enforcement, smarter road design, and proportionate rules—while resisting the temptation to treat every urban street as a laboratory for ideological experiments. Because when every 17 minutes counts, policy should be measured, affordable and focused where the risk is highest.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/aug/12/britain-20mph-zones-save-lives-traffic-safe-streets> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/reported-road-casualties-in-great-britain-provisional-results-2024/reported-road-casualties-in-great-britain-provisional-estimates-2024> - Published by the UK Department for Transport, this provisional annual report presents road casualty statistics for Great Britain for 2024. It records 1,633 fatalities and 29,537 people killed or seriously injured (KSI), comparing trends with 2023 and noting a return to pre‑pandemic traffic levels. The document includes detailed tables and charts broken down by severity, road user type, miles travelled and region, and explains the methodology and seasonal adjustments used in the analysis. The release highlights changes across user groups, notes where figures rose or fell, and sets out dates for final annual estimates, providing the authoritative national casualty dataset.
3. <https://tfl.gov.uk/info-for/media/press-releases/2025/may/powerful-new-long-term-tfl-research-shows-20mph-speed-limits-save-lives-on-london-s-roads> - Transport for London published long‑term research analysing over 150 borough 20mph schemes implemented between 1989 and 2013. The report found a 34 per cent reduction in people killed or seriously injured on borough roads following implementation, a 40 per cent fall in people killed, and a 75 per cent reduction in children killed (from four to one) in treated areas compared with background trends. TfL compared three‑year windows before and after each scheme and adjusted for wider trends, concluding 20mph limits reduce collisions and casualties, encourage walking and cycling, reduce noise, and have not increased congestion, supporting further rollout under Vision Zero.
4. <https://media.service.gov.wales/news/safest-summer-on-welsh-roads-new-statistics-show> - The Welsh Government’s release reports collision and casualty figures for the first full year since the default 20mph speed limit was introduced in September 2023. It states that, in the twelve months to September 2024, collisions on 20mph and 30mph roads fell by 26 per cent and there were around 100 fewer people killed or seriously injured compared with the previous year. The statement notes that the July–September 2024 quarter recorded its lowest casualty figures since records began, urges caution in attributing all changes solely to the speed limit, and confirms a commissioned five‑year review of the policy.
5. <https://haveyoursay.tfl.gov.uk/lowering-speed-limits/widgets/31529/faqs> - TfL’s public consultation FAQs summarise the evidence about lowering urban speed limits from 30mph to 20mph and directly address common concerns. The page cites evaluations, including Steer Davies Gleave, that show reductions in average speeds are modest and that daytime end‑to‑end journey times are unlikely to change substantially because overall travel times are mainly governed by junction delays rather than sustained higher speeds. It explains environmental evaluations found no adverse air‑quality impacts requiring modelling, says bus timetables are unlikely to need daytime changes, and sets out TfL’s evidence base for implementing lower limits on appropriate roads.
6. <https://www.london.gov.uk/media-centre/mayors-press-releases/new-evidence-reveals-all-londoners-are-now-breathing-cleaner-air-following-first-year-expanded-ultra> - A Greater London Authority press release (March 2025) presents analysis of air‑quality improvements following the first year of the expanded Ultra‑Low Emission Zone (ULEZ). It reports a 27 per cent fall in roadside nitrogen dioxide (NO2) across London in 2024 attributed to the expansion, substantial reductions in particulate emissions and estimated falls in vehicle‑derived PM2.5 in outer London, and states that air quality improved at 99 per cent of monitoring sites since 2019. The release credits ULEZ measures, scrappage support and cleaner buses with driving the rapid reductions in illegal pollution levels and framing ULEZ as a public‑health success.
7. <https://tfl.gov.uk/info-for/media/press-releases/2024/october/world-leading-direct-vision-standard-for-hgvs-strengthened-in-the-capital-helping-to-reduce-road-danger-and-save-lives> - Transport for London’s October 2024 press release outlines strengthened Direct Vision Standard (DVS) requirements for heavy goods vehicles and reports improved lorry safety since the scheme began. It explains that HGVs over 12 tonnes must meet a minimum three‑star DVS rating or fit a Progressive Safe System to operate in Greater London. TfL cites a 62 per cent reduction in the number of vulnerable road users killed by HGVs in 2023 compared with the 2017–19 baseline and highlights falls in serious injuries. The release describes permit enforcement, industry engagement and notes the EU has since incorporated direct‑vision measures into vehicle safety standards internationally.