

CLIENT PROJECT REPORT CPR2490

Monitoring and evaluation of the 55/60mph pilots

Results from stakeholder engagement following the on-road trial
of 55mph at the M3 J2-4a scheme

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1 Background

Improving customer satisfaction, particularly through roadworks, is a priority for Highways England. One potential measure to achieve this is raising the speed limit through roadworks from the current 50mph limit to 55mph or 60mph. This approach aligns with recommendation 6 from the ‘Incidents and roadworks – A road user perspective’ report which suggests that “Highways England should set speed limits in roadworks no lower than is required to maintain safety” (Transport Focus, November 2016).

This project supports the monitoring and evaluation of trials which involve raising the speed limit through roadworks, where the scheme is designed in a way that makes it safe to do so, and when road workers will not be exposed to increased risk from the increased speed limit.

An on-road pilot of a 55mph speed limit was conducted on the M3 Smart Motorway scheme between junctions 2 and 4a in the summer of 2017. A 55mph speed limit was installed between junctions 3 and 4a on the southbound carriageway.

This report presents the findings from a road worker engagement survey following the on-road pilot. The objective of this survey was to obtain the views of individuals who worked on or near the roadworks during the pilot of the 55mph speed limit, to understand how it impacted on road worker safety and operations.

2 Method

2.1 Study design

To meet the objectives of this study, a qualitative research approach was adopted. Feedback was initially intended to be discussed in face-to-face meetings with stakeholders. However, due to the availability of the relevant people from the scheme, a qualitative feedback survey was developed and administered instead.

The survey included open-ended questions to ensure that participants could provide structured, detailed and unbiased feedback. Allowing participants to make comments in their own words also enabled them to raise topics that may have been unexpected but were nonetheless important to them. Participants were assured that their responses would not be personally linked to them when reporting the results.

2.2 Surveys

Respondents were asked to comment on their experience of working on road during their trial, including safe working practices, near misses and incidents, and opinions on future trials and the wider implementation of a 55mph speed limit in roadworks.

The full list of questions is presented in Appendix A.

2.3 Respondents

The surveys were sent to a selection of individuals identified as having worked on-road during the trial, or in a relevant operational role (e.g. CCTV room operator).

Responses were received from six people with five different roles: TM manager, Traffic Coordinator, Technology Engineer, Commissioning Engineer, and Highways England Traffic Officer (HETO). The Commissioning Engineer provided only a partial response as they did not work during the period of the trial.

3 Results

3.1 During the trial

3.1.1 *GD04 process*

Prior to commencing the pilot, the scheme carried out a scheme-specific GD04 risk assessment. This assessment examined the risks to road workers and road users from the increase in speed limit, detailing the mitigation measures required to address these risks and an assessment of the tolerability of any risk change.

A Traffic Coordinator noted that during the GD04 preparation process, data was requested that had not been recorded from the beginning of the scheme. Specifically, for collisions, police and ambulance attendance was recorded but the data requested included information on casualties receiving hospital treatment. This is not routinely recorded and thus could not be provided by the scheme to support the GD04 process.

3.1.2 *Tasks carried out during the trial*

Respondents were asked to describe how they carried out tasks during the trial. The engineers, who were required to be on-site for technology commissioning, carried out their tasks as normal under full traffic management. The TM crew noted that training and procedures cover them to work in 70mph limits, so a 55mph speed limit was not seen to be any different.

When asked about changes to the way tasks were carried out due to the trial, a Traffic Officer stated that the only change was that all incidents were dealt with by rolling road block, as outlined by the working instructions.

3.1.3 *Incidents, near misses and perceptions of safety*

No incidents or near misses were reported. One respondent noted that, based on data logged on CCTV, the number of serious collisions was similar before and during the trial.

Although the majority of respondents reported no concerns with the 55mph speed limit, one respondent was concerned that the overhead signs and signals were not operating during the trial. They suggested that it would have been safer to carry out the trial after the signals were operational.

3.1.4 *Perceived benefits and dis-benefits*

The 55mph speed limit was reported to have improved the consistency of traffic flow, with fewer incidences of drivers acting unexpectedly (such as undertaking). Another respondent noted that HGVs were not close-following in the way that they had done when the speed limit was 50mph.

One respondent expressed concern that the trial was not realistic and may have given a false impression of the benefits because the trial conditions were not the same as during the roadworks; that is, the lane width had returned to normal and the barrier had been removed. They were uncertain about whether a 55mph limit would be safe in narrow lanes

when driving close to the barrier, but remarked that this speed could work at times when the works are shut down, such as Christmas.

None of the respondents mentioned any drawbacks to the 55mph speed limit. However, one felt that it would have been useful to receive a briefing about the trial and the reasons for it, as they had not been informed in advance.

3.1.5 *Challenges during the trial*

Respondents understood that the trial needed to take place towards the end of the project; however, this coincided with a time during which they were very busy preparing to handover the scheme. The extra workload, some of which was due to the monitoring requirements, was not ideal at this time.

3.2 **Future trials and rollout**

3.2.1 *Improvements which could be made to future trials*

The Traffic Coordinator stated that the lead time from being informed about the trial to running it was too short, and that if they had been informed of it in January they could have been better prepared. For example, they could have prepared data specific to GD04 requirements rather than making existing data fit the questions asked.

This trial was intended to test 55mph during the pre-commissioning phase of the scheme, when on-road work is minimised and road workers were not exposed to unacceptable risk from the increased speed limit. However, one respondent perceived that the trial was of limited value since it was not conducted under the conditions usually present during roadworks (narrow lanes with road workers present). This respondent expected that the collision risk would have been higher if works vehicles had been entering the closure and exiting back into the live lanes.

3.2.2 *Future roll-out of 55mph limits across the network*

If 55mph speed limits were to become common practice across the network where no workers were present, respondents had several suggestions for steps to be taken to ensure that the road was safer for everyone:

- Testing barriers and recovery IPVs under conditions of a 70mph impact
- More accurate speed enforcement with “more rigid limits”
- Traffic management to ensure the safety of workers and road users
- Work only when it is safe to do so and stop work if anything changes

3.2.3 *Working under 55mph speed limits in future*

Two respondents stated that they would not have a problem with carrying out their work under similar conditions in future, but two said they would only do so if safety measures were in place for workers and road users. In particular, one person suggested that there should be speed cameras to deter drivers from speeding close to the work area.

Two respondents were concerned about works vehicles pulling out into the traffic travelling at 55mph; one said they thought the speed limit could work at sites where there are limited access and egress points.

4 Summary and conclusions

Following the trial of 55mph on the M3 J2-4a, feedback surveys were sent to stakeholders involved in the planning and implementation of the trial, and stakeholders who worked in or around the roadworks during the trial. The surveys aimed to ascertain any challenges relating to the planning and implementation of the 55mph speed limit and to understand how it impacted on operatives' safety, operations and perceptions.

The results of the surveys suggest that on the whole, stakeholders did not make significant changes to their working practices during the trial. However, the additional workload associated with monitoring was noted, with one person saying that this came at a challenging time when they were already busy preparing to handover the scheme.

No incidents or near misses were reported; one respondent had checked the CCTV data and reported no change in collisions compared with the period before the trial. Some improvements in driver behaviour and in the consistency of traffic flow were noted. However, some respondents expressed safety concerns in relation to the increased speed limit, either with respect to this particular trial, or a wider rollout. In particular, concerns were raised relating to the fact that the overhead signals were not operational during the trial, and potential concerns were also raised relating to works vehicles needing to accelerate to enter live lanes from the closure.

Some stakeholders did not feel sufficiently informed about the trial or its purpose in advance. Respondents recommended informing stakeholders earlier so that they could plan their workload and make arrangements for the additional data collection required.

Appendix A Survey questions

1. What is your job role?
2. How were your tasks carried out safely whilst a 55mph speed limit was in place?
3. Did the 55mph speed limit result in changes to the way existing tasks were undertaken that were not foreseen in the GD04 or Safe Systems of Work? If yes, please describe.
4. Did the 55mph speed limit result in additional tasks being required that were not foreseen in the GD04 or Safe Systems of Work? If yes, please describe.
5. Were there any incidents or near misses during the trial that were related to the 55mph speed limit? If yes, please describe.
6. Were there any improvements or benefits during the trial related to the 55mph speed limit? Please consider all aspects of the trial including driver behaviour, workload, maintenance and management, and traffic. If yes, please describe
7. Were there any drawbacks during the trial that were related to the 55mph speed limit? Please consider all aspects of the trial including driver behaviour, workload, maintenance and management, and traffic. If yes, please describe.
8. Did you experience any challenges in performing your job role which were related to the 55mph speed limit? If yes, please describe.
9. If a 55mph speed limit was rolled out across the network at roadworks where no road workers are present, what steps would need to be taken, if any, to ensure it was safe for everyone?
10. How would you feel about working on a project that was using 55mph speed limits in this way in the future?

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