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## First 20mph year sees 100 fewer killed or badly hurt

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Political reporter, BBC Wales News



Getty Images

The first year of a controversial Welsh speed limit saw around 100 fewer people killed or seriously injured on 20 and 30mph roads, ministers have said.

New casualty data for the first year of the 20mph limit was welcomed by the Welsh government, while the Labour politician who spearheaded the policy said it showed it was "the most successful road safety intervention in modern times".

The figures showed the number of people hurt fell by 28% compared with the same period the year before, with ten fewer dead.

The number of casualties on 20 to 30mph roads between July and September 2024 was also the lowest for the three month-period since records began in 1979.

Amid longstanding rows over the speed limit within his own party, former transport minister Lee Waters urged others not to undermine the scheme.

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The Conservatives said the policy remained confusing and frustrating for drivers.

The Welsh government switched the default speed limit on mostly urban roads on 17 September 2023, and with some exemptions most 30mph roads became 20.

Introduced while Mark Drakeford was first minister, the scheme proved to be one of the Welsh government's most controversial initiatives since devolution began, and almost half a million people signed a petition calling for it to be scrapped.

The public backlash prompted a review of the policy, and councils are currently considering whether more roads can be switched back to 30mph.

On Wednesday new road casualty figures were published for July to September 2024 - meaning statistics are now available for the first year of the 20mph scheme.

In the third quarter of 2024 - July to September - there were 410 road casualties from road collisions on 20 and 30mph roads - three were fatalities, 90 were serious and 317 were slight casualties.

This was 35% lower than in the same quarter in 2023, the Welsh government said, and the lowest since records began.

During the 12 month period from October 2023 to September 2024, when the 20mph limit was in place, the number of collisions was 26% lower than the same period the year before.

Government officials have urged caution in attributing the fall in casualties to the 20mph limit.

The Welsh government's chief statistician said in a blog last year that at least three year's worth of collision data would be required for a meaningful comparison to be made.

Casualty figures have also been on a downward trend for sometime - the Welsh government said they have "declined steadily over the last decade".

The Welsh government has commissioned a five year review of the policy, which will report back in 2029.

It will include a cost and benefit assessment of the impact of the speed limit on the Welsh economy.

## 'Encouraging'

First Minister Eluned Morgan said: "These stats show how 20mph is saving lives - leading to fewer collisions, deaths and serious injuries.

"We must get the right speeds on the right roads, but to see these figures falling is positive."

Her Transport Secretary Ken Skates said: "We know there is a way to go and we've always said it will take a number of years to see the full impact of the policy but to see the figures for this quarter at their lowest level is positive."

Lee Waters, now a backbench Labour MS who was transport minister under former First Minister Mark Drakeford, said: "We can now say with confidence that in its first year the speed limit reduction represents the most successful road safety intervention in modern times.

"As we said in advance, a little bit slower but a whole lot better."

The policy had proved divisive within the Labour Party as well as the wider public - the current First Minister Eluned Morgan has admitted problems in the way the policy was implemented.

In his statement Waters added: "We need to make sure we now don't undermine this excellent progress."

Conservative shadow transport secretary Peter Fox added: "While we welcome any decrease in road casualties, these figures don't tell the whole story. Our concern remains the way the 20mph speed limit has been implemented."

"The Welsh Labour government's default approach has created confusion and frustration for drivers and their current review must address these implementation issues and ensure a more sensible and effective approach."

## Casualties at 20mph and 30mph in Wales

Killed and seriously injured (KSI) and all severities, October to September periods

### Killed or seriously injured ▾

Killed or seriously injured    All severities

Source: Welsh government. police forces. January 2025 • 12 month periods from October



### Analysis

*By Gareth Lewis, BBC Wales political editor*

The contrast in language between the man now in charge of transport and the man who drove the 20mph law through might well cause you to slam the brakes on and take a closer look.

Even allowing for the caveat of more time needed for a full evaluation, Ken Skates' cautious welcome highlights how toxic an issue 20mph has become for Welsh Labour.

It came up time and time again out on the road during the general election campaign – even though it's a Welsh government and not Westminster issue – and a Senedd election is looming.

If the evidence does eventually show that the drop in casualties is definitively linked to 20mph then it could cause an issue for the law's political opponents - especially the Conservatives and Reform – should public support for 20mph start to grow.

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