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# YORKSHIRE POST

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Danny Dorling:

## Lower speeds save lives and revive communities

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2014  
06:00

3 comments

**THE number of pedestrians and cyclists dying on Britain's roads is on the rise. In 2011, overall deaths rose by three per cent to 1,901. Within that figure, the climb in pedestrian deaths was much faster – up by 12 per cent to 453 deaths – with children and older people suffering the greatest increases.**

Deaths for cyclists jumped in the year to 2012. And although the number of road deaths fell slightly last year, the proportion of pedestrians and cyclists being killed or seriously injured has been steadily rising for many years.

Road crashes remain the most likely single cause of death for older children and young adults in the UK. A car or lorry is almost invariably involved and in the vast majority of cases they are travelling at more than 20mph.

In half of the [incidents](#) where adults are hit by a vehicle travelling at 40mph or above, they die. In the majority of collisions at 30mph involving small children, the results again prove fatal.

Therefore the aim must be to get the speed limit on 40mph roads down to 30mph, and on faster roads down to 55mph.

For now, however, we should concentrate on the bulk of Britain's residential roads and ensure that where there is the default 30mph speed limit it is reduced to 20mph.

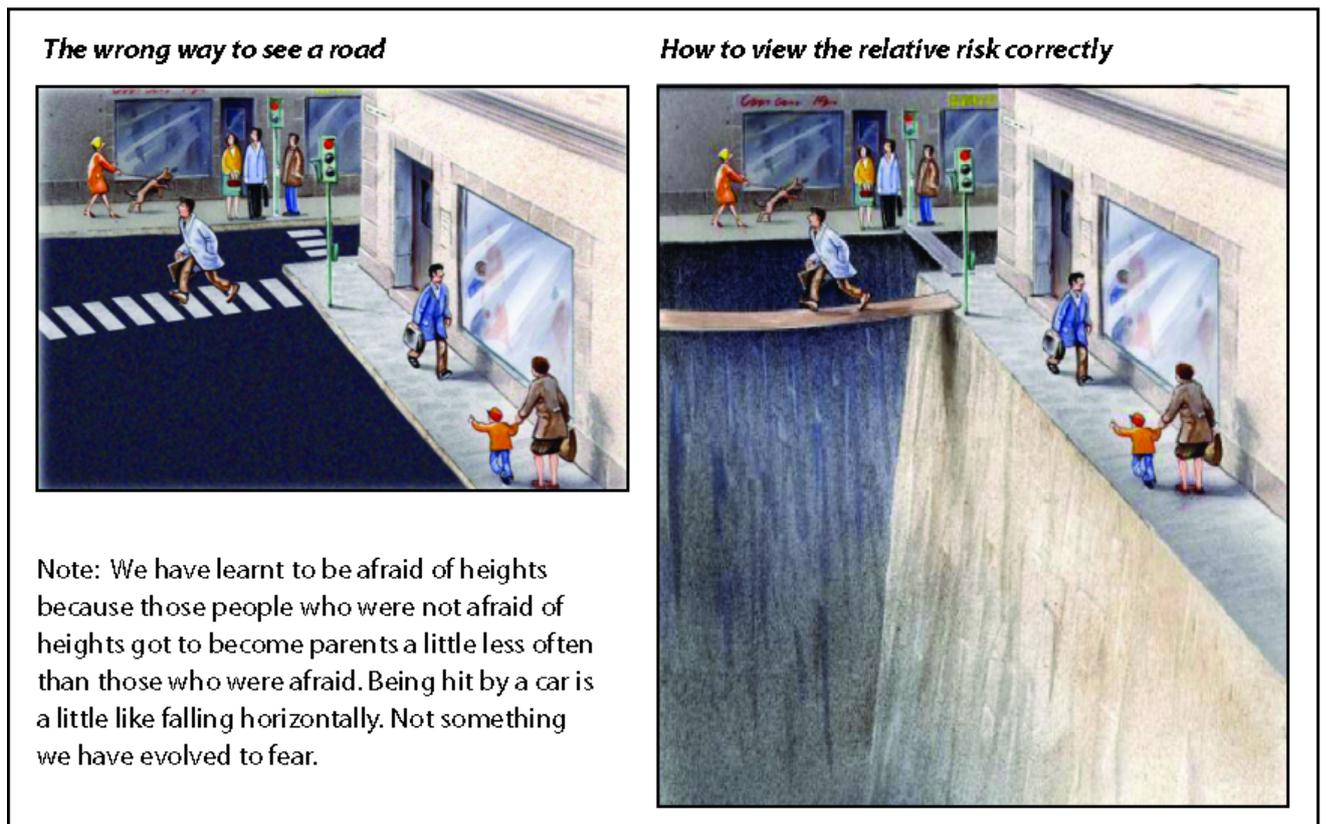
The reason is simple: when vehicles are travelling at 20mph or below, most adults and children survive collisions.

In November 2012, when Olympic gold medal-winning cyclist Bradley Wiggins was knocked off his bike, there was a sign of a change in national mood in terms of recognising these dangers.

The following are just a few of the many and varied reasons in favour of lower limits outlined on the website of the national 20's Plenty For Us campaign:

1. 20mph is better for drivers. Motorists cut their spacing as braking distances contract. Shorter gaps mean more [vehicles](#) can use the available road space, reducing standing traffic.
2. Filtering at junctions becomes easier. It is far easier for motorists to pull into traffic travelling at 20mph than at 30mph. It is also much easier for cycles to avoid being cut up by cars and lorries when they are travelling more slowly and turning left less rapidly.
3. Traffic volumes decrease, since slower speeds encourage active, sustainable and shared travel. Walking and cycling levels rose by up to 12 per cent after Bristol's 20mph limit was introduced.
4. Buses operate more efficiently. The reduced length of traffic queues means that bus journey times decrease, and become more reliable.
5. More children are likely to walk or cycle to school on their own. Parents are not tied to the school run.
6. Older people are less fearful of going out of their [home](#), trying to cross the street, or of driving their own cars at a reasonable (*i.e.* slower) speed, rather than always at 30mph.
7. All those people who are afraid to cycle become more likely to cycle. The population as a whole benefits from not sitting in cars.
8. Pollution is reduced, less petrol is consumed, and – ultimately – fewer wars need be fought over oil. Areas like the Antarctic may not need to see oil wells and pollution engulf them.
9. Neighbourhoods work better. There is a greater incentive to use local shops rather than drive to supermarkets. 20mph is very good socially, locally as well as environmentally and globally.
10. People learn that, if they can alter their environment to make it more sociable in terms of speed, then maybe there are other things they can change too.

Figure 5: How we might view roads had we more time to evolve with them.



Source: Johansson, R., (2009) Presentation: Chief Strategist, Road Safety Division, Swedish Road Administration, Improving Road Safety in Scotland: Prevention and Best Practice. Edinburgh, Tuesday 3rd of February.

The residential road I used to live on in Sheffield was 40mph. No children ever crossed it on their own, at least not those under the age of 14. It just cut the neighbourhood in two.

Where I now live, in Oxford, 20mph is the default speed. This is better for everyone who shares the roads and needs to cross them.

You introduce 20mph limits by local councillors voting them through. To do that, those councillors need to be convinced that they work, and to know that they are not alone in taking this step. From February 2011 to June 2012, a total of 25 new 20mph limits were implemented (without associated traffic calming measures) in towns and villages across the East Riding of Yorkshire. City of York Council is introducing the limit on all its residential roads and for larger satellite villages. And there is evidence that this lower limit is saving lives.

In Burnley, Lancashire, for instance, the pilot scheme to introduce 20mph from February 2011 to April 2012 alone resulted in overall figures falling from 46 casualties a year, with six deaths and serious injuries, to 25, with two deaths and serious injuries – and no child deaths or serious injuries.

Soon, living in an area where the speed limits remain at 30mph will be seen as strange, as being behind the times and still living in ignorance of the evidence. At least that must be the hope.

- Danny Dorling is the Halford Mackinder Professor of Geography at Oxford University.

[www.20splentyforus.org.uk](http://www.20splentyforus.org.uk)

### 3 comments

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**rantingron**

8:45 AM on 22/01/2014

I blame Jeremy Clarkson — but then, who doesn't?

**rantingron**

8:43 AM on 22/01/2014

Wait for the howls of protest from motorists. They think they should be entitled to do just as they like on Britain's roads.

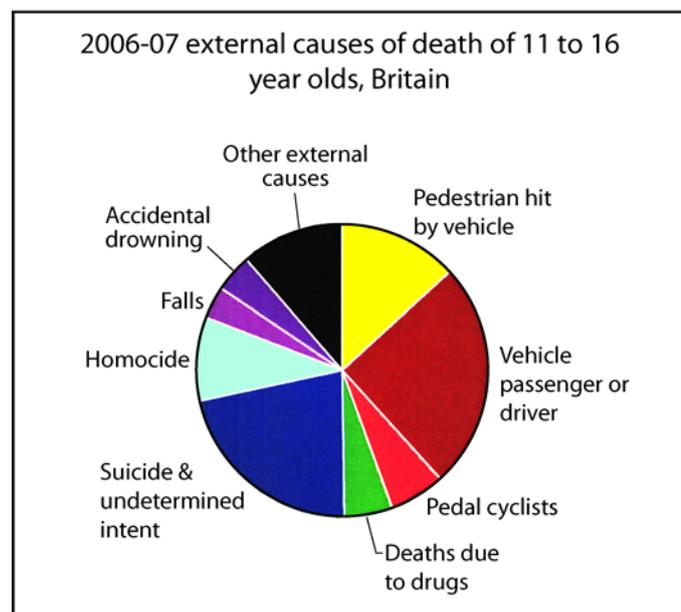
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**rantingron**

8:42 AM on 22/01/2014

Speed limit of 20mph or below on residential roads? Yes, please, can't come fast enough, as far as I'm concerned.

Figure 1: Deaths of children aged 11 to 16 in Britain not attributed to disease (2006-2007).



Source: Dorling, D. (2011), PACTS' 21st Westminster Lecture. [http://www.dannydorling.org/?page\\_id=1916](http://www.dannydorling.org/?page_id=1916).