



Department  
for Transport

Department for Transport  
Great Minster House  
33 Horseferry Road  
London  
SW1P 4DR  
Tel: 0300 330 3000

Web Site: [www.gov.uk/dft](http://www.gov.uk/dft)

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David Alfred

By email to: [request-420628-  
e652eb48@whatdotheyknow.com](mailto:request-420628-e652eb48@whatdotheyknow.com)

Dear Mr Alfred

Thank you for your enquiry of 23 July about traffic calming & average speed comparisons. I have been asked to reply.

Before I do so I will first explain that although you had referred to the Freedom of Information Act ("the Act") in your request, I will reply outside of the Act as you have not asked for written recorded information held by the Department for Transport (DfT), but rather for advice on a specific situation.

I note your reference to traffic calming and that it is to support whatever speed limit is in place but I can confirm that the primary purpose of traffic calming is to reduce vehicle speeds in areas where inappropriate speed is a problem. Traffic calming plays an important role in improving road safety and each 1 mph reduction in vehicle speed resulting from traffic calming has been found to reduce accidents by around 5%.

You have asked why local authorities rely exclusively on comparisons of average speeds. Advice on this is contained in the DfT's guidance document Circular 01/2013 "Setting local speed limits" and was changed in 2006 from previous advice that local authorities should use the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speed (the speed at or below which 85% of traffic is travelling). The DfT's view is that the average or mean speed (which would tend to lead to slightly lower speeds) should be the main speed consideration in the setting of local speed limits.

Local speed limits are determined using a series of underlying principles. The distribution of vehicle speeds on a road is just one of the factors to be taken into consideration. Mean speeds are easier to explain and understand (confirmed by those authorities and police using this approach) and they are simpler to measure consistently. In addition, mean speeds are felt to reflect the speed choice of the majority of drivers.

Please refer to paragraphs 35 and 36 in the Circular which is available at –

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/setting-local-speed-limits>

Much of the speed and accident relationship evidence is determined by and around mean vehicle speeds. This includes two research reports undertaken by TRL for the DfT, which are frequently cited and recognised by practitioners. TRL Report 421 “The effects of drivers’ speed on the frequency of road accidents” is available on TRL’s website at –

[trl.co.uk/reports/TRL421](http://trl.co.uk/reports/TRL421)

and TRL Report 511 “The relationship between speed and accidents on rural single-carriageway roads”. Information on this report can be found at –

[www.dft.gov.uk/rmd/project.asp?intProjectID=10064](http://www.dft.gov.uk/rmd/project.asp?intProjectID=10064)

However, please note that while traffic authorities are asked to have regard to this guidance it is not mandatory and the final decision is for the traffic authority, working with the police who would carry out any enforcement.

I hope that this has clarified the issue.

Yours sincerely

*Judith Tracey*