



AVZ Blog (May 2021) Speeding—an offence like no other.

No other offence causes as much death and destruction as does speeding.

To commemorate UN Road Safety Week with its core theme of 20mph/30kmh, and with five people still dying each day on Britain's roads, Action Vision Zero (AVZ) highlights five ways in which speeding is exceptional.

1. No other offence contributes as much to fatal collisions.

Police have traditionally prioritised the fatal four—speeding, drink/drug driving, use of mobile phone and non-use of seat belts—as the key causes of road death and serious injury. But speeding dominates by far.

Based on contributory factors, Department for Transport (DfT) reports speeding is involved in 28% of fatal crashes (348), including 19% reported as exceeding the speed limit and another 9% as driving too fast for the conditions. But [contributory factors](#) are estimated by police at the time the crash is reported and thus before any real investigation has occurred.

Imagine if best guesses were not used and instead, contributory factor data was collected at the end of the investigation. Well, that is what the [police did in London](#)...

A Metropolitan Police review of fatal collision investigations for 2019 showed that around half of these had speed as a contributing factor to the collision, which is why speed enforcement across London is a priority for TfL and the police.

So, speeding could be involved in almost twice as many fatal crashes as previously thought.

The unreliability of contributory factors should not surprise anyone. [Contributory factors](#) data reported mobile phone use by drivers as being involved in just 1% of fatal crashes (17). And according to [contributory factors](#), drug driving is involved in 6% fatal crashes and drink driving in 8% of fatal crashes. But DfT invests in accurate drink drive estimates of fatal crashes, including with monitoring coroner data. And DfT reports [drink driving](#) to be involved in 13% of road deaths.

We need the DfT to prioritise accurate data collection of the role that speed plays in collisions as it has done for decades with drink driving.

2. No other offence worsens the outcomes of crashes as much

Even if speeding was not the cause of the collision, it will still aggravate the outcome. This is physics.

Vehicle impact speed, which will be based on vehicle travelling speed, is a key factor in determining the extent of injury, pain and suffering, especially to those outside the vehicle. Using a mobile phone, drink/drug driving do not worsen the casualty severity.

According to a 2020 report by the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety ([PACTS](#)), as many as 31% of motor vehicle occupants killed (261) were not wearing a seat belt. These will mainly be a driver not choosing to wear a seat belt. And speeding will also have contributed to these deaths.

Instead of contributory factors and causation, the focus should be on prevention; with respect to this, reducing speed can have an even larger role to play.

3. No other offence causes as much intimidation

Fears of drink drivers are not what stops parents from letting their children cycle to school. It is the speed of motor vehicle traffic. As Living Streets noted in their report [Swap the school run for a school walk](#), the 2018 National Travel Survey report stated:

60% of parents and carers who walk their child to school say that traffic danger is the main reason for accompanying them.

It is the speed of drivers that limits the choice of others to walk and cycle. This is why speed enforcement and 20mph limits are key for active travel campaigners.

4. No other offence causes environmental harm

It is not just the health of people that suffer from speeding. Speed limits on motorways have been reduced in order to reduce air pollution. As [Highways England](#) noted:

Our modelling and research and collaboration with other road operators shows that lowering the speed limit to 60mph is the most effective emissions reduction option.

This is another example of how speed causes more harm than that measured by road crashes and their casualties. And of course, without lower speed limits and less speeding, people will be reluctant to leave the safety of their cars to walk and cycle.

Whilst road safety has traditionally focused on the casualties of collisions, road danger reduction is concerned with the wider impacts of excessive and inappropriate use of motor vehicles, such as speeding. We need a road danger reduction appreciation of the harm caused by speeding.

5. No other offence is so common

[DfT's vehicle speed survey](#) reports over half of drivers exceeding the speed limit on 30mph roads (54%). The percentage is even higher on 20mph roads, but the number of roads that are monitored is very small and [DfT](#) acknowledges that they are unlikely to be representative of the sorts of roads that typically have 20mph limits.

Speed limit offences dominate traffic law enforcement. Of the 2.7 million motoring offences reported by the [Home Office](#) in 2019, 85% were for speed limit offences (2.3m). The total number of speed limit offences has increased in recent years (+66%), with the vast majority detected by cameras.

The big worry is with officer detected speed limit offences. These have decreased by 62%, from 166,878 in 2011 to 63,661 in 2019. With over 4,600 roads policing officers, this equates to less than 14 speed limit offences per roads policing officer a year—just over one per month.

Tackling speeding was one of the key calls of our joint [Police and Crime Commissioner manifesto](#), supported by British Cycling, Cycling UK, Living Streets, Road Danger Reduction Forum, RoadPeace, Sustrans and 20's Plenty for Us. We will continue to campaign for PCCs to support more speed enforcement, including by officers and on 20mph roads. Many PCCs, especially new ones, are promoting Community Speed Watch, which is good but will need to be complimented by police enforcement.

If you want to know how well your police has done with officer detected speed offences, see [AVZ's blog](#) comparing officer detected speed limit offences by police services.

Plus if you want to be inspired and hear about recent advances, both in Britain and elsewhere, watch the webinar being organised by our colleagues and friends at 20's Plenty for Us [National 20mph urban Defaults - 20's Plenty for Us \(20splenty.org\)](#)