

FAQs about the consultation proposing amendments to the motorway speed limits for heavier goods carrying and passenger carrying vehicles

Q1: Which speed limits are you proposing to change ?

A1: The motorway speed limits for the following classes of vehicle:

- goods vehicles with a maximum laden weight of between 3.5 tonnes and 7.5 tonnes – the proposal is to reduce **the motorway limit from 70mph to 60mph**;
- heavier passenger carrying vehicles (PCVs) less than 12 metres in length – which weigh more than 3.05 tonnes unladen or have more than 8 passenger seats – **the proposal is to reduce the motorway limit from 70mph to 65mph**;
- PCVs exceeding 12 metres overall length – **the proposal is to increase the motorway limit from 60mph to 65mph**.

Q2: Are car speed limits being changed?

A2: No.

Q3 Are van speed limits being changed?

A3. No, not if the maximum laden weight of the van does not exceed 3.5 tonnes.

Q4: Are there any other types of vehicle that would be affected if the proposals go ahead?

A4: Yes,

- Motor caravans; and,
 - dual purpose vehicles
- where they are adapted to carry more than 8 passengers or where they weigh more than 3.05 tonnes unladen.

Q5: Why are these additional classes of vehicle included in the proposal?

A5: Because they are very similar in size and performance to the main vehicle classes we are concerned with (HGVs and PCVs) – and because they are already subject to the same speed limits as these HGVs and PCVs now.

Q6. You refer to PCVs with more than 8 passenger seats or exceeding 3.05 tonnes unladen weight – shouldn't this read 3.50 tonnes, not 3.05 tonnes?

A6. No, 3.05 tonnes is currently prescribed under item 1 in Schedule 6 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.

Q7. Where are the current motorway speed limits set out?

A7. The current motorway limits are set out in the table in Schedule 6 of the Road traffic Regulation Act 1984.

Q8: Why propose changes to the motorway speed limits for heavier vehicles?

A8: To make the motorway speed limits more closely aligned with the maximum powered speed capability for the majority of vehicles in these classes.

Q9: What are the maximum powered speed capabilities of the vehicles in question?

A9:

- 56 mph (90 kmh) for most modern goods vehicles exceeding 3.5 tonnes (because they are built that way in accordance with EU law on 'speed limitation devices' – see Directive 2002/85/EC); and,
- 62.5 mph (100 kmh) for most modern large PCVs (because they are built that way in accordance with EU law on 'speed limitation devices' – see directive 2002/85/EC).

Q10: What are the benefits of making the changes?

A10: In summary, benefits would be realised through: a levelling of the playing field for vehicle operators; simplification of the rules; aiding road safety; and, enforcement. In detail:

- **Removing a commercial disparity** between operators of older vehicles whose vehicles are currently able to travel faster than those with newer, speed-limited, vehicles.
- **Removing any incentive to hang on to older** (more polluting and generally less roadworthy) **vehicles** merely in order to benefit from a higher maximum speed capability.
- **Simplification** of regulations – because there would only be one maximum speed limit for goods vehicle exceeding 3.5 tonnes laden weight and one for PCVs with more than 8 passenger seats or exceeding 3.05 tonnes unladen weight (instead of two for each currently depending on weight and length, respectively).
- **Safety** – because drivers would know what maximum speed to expect – and they would also know that no HGV or PCV weighing more than 3.05 tonnes or with more than 8 passenger seats should be in the outside lane (whereas non-speed-limited ones currently can be).
- **Enforcement** – because it would be much easier for the police to enforce just one speed limit per vehicle class – and it would consequently also reduce the incentive for operators and drivers to tamper with speed limiters (as some currently do in order to gain a speed advantage).

Q11. How many vehicles would be affected by the proposals?

A11. It is difficult to give precise numbers, because we do not know for sure how many vehicles are still in service – particularly with regards to motor caravans and dual purpose vehicles – and we do not know how many of these vehicles are likely to use the motorway.

To make our assessment of the likely numbers of vehicles that would be affected we looked at vehicle registration data. We estimated that between 11,000 and 18,000 3.5-7.5 tonne HGVs; and, up to 84,000 PCVs could potentially be affected. However, we think that, generally speaking, older vehicles are thought to be used less often on motorways than newer ones.

Q12: What is the current motorway speed limit for HGVs?

A12: There are two limits:

- 60mph for HGVs exceeding 7.5tonnes maximum laden weight; and,
 - 70mph for HGVs with a maximum laden weight of 7.5tonnes or less.
- Our proposal will harmonise the limits for goods vehicles exceeding 3.5 tonnes maximum laden weight.

Q13: What is the current motorway speed limit for larger PCVs?

A13: There are two limits:

- 70mph for PCVs weighing more than 3.05 tonnes or having more than 8 passenger seats not exceeding 12 metres in overall length; and,
- 60mph for PCVs that exceed 12 metres.

So our proposal will harmonise the limits to 65mph for those PCVs that have more than 8 passenger seats or exceed 3.05 tonnes unladen.

Q14: Why are some vehicles speed-limited and others not?

A14: EU law requires that certain classes of vehicle are 'speed-limited' by design. The law was originally introduced in respect of the larger, heavier, HGVs and PCVs in 1992 (Directive 92/6/EEC); and, was subsequently extended to smaller classes of HGV and PCV registered since 1st October 2001 (Directive 2002/85/EC).

Q15: Won't the speed limit reduction result in more congestion?

A15: No, because when traffic is free-flowing the additional vehicles which would in future need to comply with the lower speed limits will only comprise a relatively small proportion of traffic and will be easily overtaken by faster-moving lighter vehicles. At times when the motorway is busy most vehicles travel at similar and lower speeds anyway, and so speed limit reductions to 65mph and 60 mph for heavier vehicles should make no difference on these occasions.

Q16: Which vehicles are currently banned from using the outside lane of motorways?

A16: As the law stands at present the following vehicles are prohibited from using the outside lane of a motorway:

- any vehicle which is required by law to be speed-limited by design; or
- any vehicle which exceeds 7.5 tonnes maximum laden weight.

[This is primarily because such vehicles cannot travel at the legal maximum speed allowed on motorways (70mph)].

Q17: Which vehicles does the consultation propose to ban from the outside lane of motorways

A17: All those vehicles which would have their motorway speed limit reduced below 70 mph.

These are all vehicles of a similar size and weight – and they are already listed together in schedule 6 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act (RTA) 1984 for this reason.

Q18: Won't banning more vehicles from the outside lane lead to more congestion?

A18: No, we don't believe so – because when traffic is free-flowing the additional vehicles which would in future need to comply with the prohibition on using the outside lane will only comprise a relatively small proportion of the motorway traffic.

Q19: If the proposals are taken forward when will they be implemented?

A19: This is just the first stage of the process – and regulations will not be drafted until we have fully considered the consultation responses. So we would not be looking to bring the proposed changes into force before 2011.

Q20: How will you publicise any changes?

A20: We will have a fully comprehensive publicity strategy, and would contact those who have expressed an interest directly, as well as putting information on the DT website.

Q21: If you are lowering the speed limit why aren't you setting them at the same speed as the speed-limiter limit?

A21: Because speed limiters are permitted to have a small technical tolerance which may mean that the 'powered speed' of the vehicle is very slightly more than the speed to which the speed limiting function has been set. Also because vehicles may run slightly faster than the set speed of the speed limiter when they are travelling downhill.

Q22: Why is it that you are setting a speed limit at a level which is not divisible by 10?

A22: There is no requirement for speed limits to be in multiples of 10. The speed limit of 65 mph suggested in future for PCVs is – in our judgement – an appropriate and easy-to-remember limit.