

# Don't Blame Pedestrians!

**A 20's Plenty for Us Briefing, March 2012**

**Some drivers blame pedestrians 'taking chances' as the reason they make up 22% of those killed or seriously injured on our roads. But how easy is it to cross safely? Who's to blame when walkers die?**



Society would be very limited if we were only permitted to cross roads at signalised junctions. It isn't feasible. In the UK there is no 'jay-walking' law and we accept that pedestrians need to cross roads without signals, zebra crossings or traffic islands.

Health trends show that British people are exercising less and becoming increasingly obese. As a result the average person is walking slower. Consider also that young children cannot walk as quickly as adults. Those with a pushchair, wheelchair, mobility scooter, shopping trolley or walking aid are limited in their speed. They need time to negotiate kerbs and other obstacles.

At locations without pedestrian crossings, pedestrians need to identify a gap in the traffic to be able to cross. To cross two lanes of traffic most pedestrians will accept a 4 to 6 second gap but some people need gaps of 10 to 12 seconds due to limited mobility.<sup>1</sup> The availability of gaps depends on factors like traffic volumes, density, time of day and, crucially, vehicle speeds.

Currently pedestrians have to assume that traffic on 30mph roads is going faster than the law allows as 49% of drivers speed in 30mph areas and the police don't tend to penalise drivers below 36mph.

- **At 36 mph a 5 second gap is a distance of 80 metres and a 10 second gap is 160 metres**
- **At 18 mph a 5 second gap is a distance of 40 metres and a 10 second gap is 80 metres**

How often is it possible to see traffic clearly for a tenth of a mile (160m) in either direction? Sight lines are often blocked due to parked vehicles at either side of the road, corners and obstructions – it is no wonder that children and older people struggle to cross roads safely in current conditions.

The danger is even greater for children. Research by scientists at Royal Holloway has shown children under 11 cannot reliably judge the approach speeds of vehicles over 20mph as their visual systems have not fully developed.

- **Halving vehicle speeds would make it twice as easy for pedestrians to cross safely.**

Not only that but halving vehicle speeds would reduce the kinetic energy (that kills and injures people) by a factor of four. 20mph limits work to reduce the dangers imposed on society by motor vehicles. 20's Plenty, 30 hurts me. So adopt a 20mph limit policy where people live and join the authorities of over 7.5 million people in the UK.

<sup>1</sup> Department for Transport, Local Transport Note 1/95. Available online at: <http://assets.dft.gov.uk/publications/local-transport-notes/ltn-1-95.pdf>

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