

CLIENT PROJECT REPORT CPR2418

Monitoring and evaluation of the 55/60mph pilots

Results from stakeholder engagement following the on-road trial
of 60mph on the M1 J32-35a scheme

A Tailor

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Executive summary

Improving customer satisfaction, particularly through roadworks, is a priority for Highways England. One potential measure to achieve this is raising the speed limit through roadworks from the current 50mph limit to 55mph or 60mph. This approach aligns with recommendation 6 from the ‘Incidents and roadworks – A road user perspective’ report which suggests that “Highways England should set speed limits in roadworks no lower than is required to maintain safety” (Transport Focus, November 2016).

This project supports the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of raising the speed limit through roadworks, where the scheme is designed in a way that makes it safe to do so, and when road workers will not be exposed to increased risk from the increased speed limit.

This report presents the findings from a focus group with 10 representatives from the highways industry who had experience working in or around the roadworks during the on-road pilot of 60mph at the M1 J32-35a scheme during November and December 2016. The objectives of the focus group were to seek in-depth feedback from industry stakeholders on the findings of the on-road trial and to obtain their views and perceptions on the 60mph speed limit to understand how it impacted on worker safety and operations.

Thematic analysis of participants’ responses derived five key themes, which generated a number of key findings:

- Individuals who work on road seek clear, consistent and timely communication about the implementation of a higher speed limit
- Significant concerns and a perceived reduction in safety, particularly with regard to incident severity, may remain even with a lack of trial evidence that risk is increased by implementing a 60mph speed limit
- Operatives may view a 60mph speed limit in roadworks as a threat to the prioritisation of road worker safety and to the advancements in safety that have been made to date
- Operatives’ opinions of a new speed limit are influenced by their perceptions of how aware drivers are and whether driver responses to a change in speed limit will be appropriate
- Some operatives have misunderstood or doubted the intended implementation of the 60mph speed limit, leading to questions about the validity of research findings
- Operatives view public education and awareness as a higher priority than customer satisfaction, with safety being a central message
- Expectations about changes in traffic behaviour resulting from a 60mph speed limit may lead to changes in working practices, such as shifting tasks to night time

The findings collated in this report supplement and enrich the quantitative analysis of road user behaviour and safety that was conducted as part of the on-road trial of 60mph at the M1 J32-35a scheme. It is recommended that the focus group findings are considered alongside these on-road trial findings as well as evidence from other pilot schemes and research activities (such as the Stakeholder Perception Survey).

1 Background

The purpose of the 60mph pilot scheme is to inform any future implementation of a 60mph speed limit at roadworks to ensure it is appropriately and safely realised to maximise benefit and minimise risk. This requires independent, robust, data-led evaluation of the impact of the change in speed limit on behaviour and safety, as well as a thorough consideration of the perceptions and working practices of customers and industry stakeholders.

The on-road pilot of 60mph at the M1 Junction 32-35a scheme was conducted between November and December 2016. This on-road trial sought to understand whether or not the change in speed limit from 50mph to 60mph impacted on the safety of road users and workers. Road user behaviour and the incidence of collisions, breakdowns and work zone incursions were monitored before and after the change in speed limit. A survey was also carried out at the nearest service station (Motorway Service Area, MSA) with drivers who had driven through the scheme, in order to understand driver perceptions of the 60mph speed limit through the roadworks.

Results from analysis of road user behaviour showed no evidence that the 60mph speed limit had a negative impact on road user safety. There was some evidence to suggest that TM maintenance requirements changed during the trial, however the corresponding change in risk for the road workers carrying out this activity was negligible. The MSA survey results suggested that drivers were more satisfied with 60mph speed limits through roadworks than 50mph. As such, it was recommended that the on-road pilots continue. The full results from analysis of these data are presented in a separate report: *'Monitoring and evaluation of the 55/60mph pilots: Interim report for the on-road trials of 60mph on the M1 J32-35a scheme'* (Wallbank, Palmer, Hammond and Myers, 2017).

Following the on-road pilot, a focus group was conducted with operatives who worked in or around the roadworks during the trial on the M1 J32-35a scheme. This document reports on the focus group and its key findings, examining the perspectives of road workers rather than road users.

1.1 Objectives

The focus group engaged with workers who operated on road during the trial as well as other individuals involved with planning, operations, health and safety, traffic management and enforcement. The objectives were two-fold:

1. To disseminate the results of the on-road trial relating to the impact of the 60mph speed limit on road user behaviour and safety, and seek feedback from industry stakeholders on these findings
2. To obtain the views and perceptions of industry stakeholders on the 60mph speed limit in order to understand the ways in which it impacted on worker safety and operations

The focus group was structured to explore the experiences of stakeholders during the trial and discuss the control measures which would be needed if Highways England was to roll out 60mph speed limits in roadworks at more schemes in the future.

2 Method

2.1 Study design

To meet the objectives of this study a qualitative research approach was required; this ensured that the topic could be explored in depth and that detailed and unbiased feedback could be obtained from key stakeholders involved with the on-road trial of 60mph. Since road workers and other operatives within the highways industry are a difficult group to reach via online or paper-based surveys, the qualitative method which was selected for this study was a focus group.

Focus groups are a useful tool for stimulating open-ended, but structured discussion around a given topic whilst also minimising the time burden on the organisations whose staff were recruited for the study. Focus groups are an efficient technique for gathering data from several people at the same time. Participants are able to make comments in their own words, and are stimulated by thoughts and comments shared by others in the group. Group dynamics help to focus on those topics that are most important, and allow the researcher to easily assess the extent to which a view is consistent and shared among different participants. Facilitation by trained researchers ensured that the group dynamics were managed appropriately and that the discussion was not dominated by any one participant.

The findings from this focus group are not intended to be generalised to a wider population, as the views expressed cannot be regarded as representative of all road workers and operatives; nevertheless, this study allowed a deeper exploration of the impact of the 60mph pilot scheme on behaviours and attitudes of key stakeholders which can be used to enrich the findings from the on-road trial.

As part of the focus group, results from the on-road trial were presented to the participants to disseminate the key findings and lessons learned, and provide operatives with the opportunity to ask questions about the results or add comment.

2.2 Participants

A total of ten representatives were invited to participate in the focus group; the sample included individuals from multiple areas across the industry including traffic management, construction, vehicle recovery, health and safety, technology, enforcement and operations.

2.3 Focus group format

The focus group was attended by two researchers from TRL; one who facilitated the discussion and one who took notes.

The structure of the focus group is shown in Table 1. The session began with a presentation to participants to give an overview of the on-road trial and provide an opportunity for participants to ask initial questions and share their expectations of the trial findings. Following this, a further presentation was given to share the findings from the on-road trial (see Wallbank *et al.*, 2017). The next part of the session then consisted of a structured discussion to provide participants with an opportunity to share their views, perceptions and feedback from their experience during the trial.

A topic guide was developed to guide the discussion and ensure that all relevant issues were covered, whilst providing enough flexibility to facilitate open discussion. Where necessary, the researchers probed particular areas of discussion using pre-defined prompts in order to explore topics in further depth.

Table 1. Focus group format

Topic	Format
Overview of the trial <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depiction of speed limits on the dates • Dates of the baseline and trial periods 	Presentation by TRL
Discussion of expectations	Group discussion
Presentation of the trial results <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on driving performance (speed, headway) • Impact on incidents • Impact on journey time • Impact on customer satisfaction 	Presentation by TRL
Discussion of participants' experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thoughts on the trial results • Working during the trial • Safety • Driver behaviour • Challenges • Benefits • Disbenefits • Future implementation 	Group discussion

2.4 Data collection

The focus group gathered qualitative data encompassing the attitudes and perceptions of participants in relation to the topics outlined in Table 1. With participants' permission, the discussion was recorded using a digital voice recorder (DVR). Notes were taken by a researcher during the discussion.

2.5 Data analysis

The focus group recording was transcribed by a third-party transcription company. The data were analysed using Inductive Thematic Analysis, which aims to identify patterns of meaning across a dataset, involving the following steps (Braun and Clarke, 2006):

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1. **Familiarisation with the data:** Reading the transcript to become familiar with the data.
 2. **Coding:** Concisely labelling features of the data that might be relevant to the research aim. The whole transcript is coded, and the codes and relevant data extracts are collated.
 3. **Searching for themes:** Examining the codes and data extracts to identify significant patterns of meaning (i.e. potential themes).
 4. **Reviewing themes:** Checking the potential themes against the data, to determine that they accurately reflect the data and answer the research question(s).
 5. **Defining and naming themes:** Working out the scope and focus of each theme.
 6. **Writing up:** Synthesising the narrative and data extracts.

The results of this analysis and the final themes which were extracted are presented in Section 3.

3 Results and discussion

This section discusses the key themes which emerged from the thematic analysis of the focus group transcript. Where appropriate, verbatim quotes from the transcript have been presented to illustrate the themes.

3.1 Theme 1: There was a perceived need for better planning and communication during the trial

Trial planning and communication during the trial was a key area of discussion in the focus group. Participants felt that their organisations were not sufficiently informed about the trial prior to it starting and so had a perceived uncertainty about whether or not the trial was going to take place. Participants stated a preference for being informed about the trial at the very beginning of the scheme. Those who were informed about the trial during the planning stage acknowledged that individuals who were involved in the delivery of the trial were under time pressure and would have liked more time to prepare for the trial. Overall, clearer and more advanced communication about the trial was seen as desirable. This suggests a need for open and transparent relationships with stakeholders. Future trials should seek to engage with stakeholders early in the process, so as to maximise time for planning and preparation. Communications about the trial should be clear and consistent to promote buy-in.

“As a firm, we was let down because we didn’t get the right information...[I would have liked] a group discussion of all the recovery lads in a room, just like we are now, and said, ‘right, well, this is what we’re going to do and this is what’s going to happen’.”

“I think it’s fair to say that it was very compressed and there wasn’t a lot of time to deliver it to everybody...everybody who ran it said ‘we would have liked more time’.”

3.2 Theme 2: Safety is paramount for workers on the road

Participants’ comments about the trial, and about their work generally, were heavily focused on safety. Common perceptions and attitudes related to safety during the on-road trial of the 60mph speed limit are summarised in the sections below.

3.2.1 *Perceived impact of 60mph speed limit on safety*

In discussing their expectations prior to the trial, operatives revealed that they typically expected that the 60mph speed limit would reduce road user and road worker safety. However, there was no evidence of a reduction in safety following analysis of road user behaviour (see Wallbank *et al.*, 2016). The key findings from the on-road trial may be summarised as follows:

- Compliance with the 60mph speed limit was generally good, with average speeds remaining below the speed limit;

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- Average headway was typically much larger than two seconds (a guideline considered to be a safe following distance), suggesting that safe stopping distances were maintained when travelling through roadworks at 60mph;
 - Of the four RTCs that occurred during the trial, a review of CCTV for three of the incidents suggested that they were unrelated to the 60mph speed limit and there were no serious injuries, and;
 - There was no evidence that the 60mph speed limit led to a greater number of incursions into the TM.

These findings were shared with participants in the focus group. Participants remained apprehensive about the 60mph speed limit despite results indicating there were no significant concerns with road user behaviour identified during the trial. The increase in the speed limit was perceived as inherently less safe; participants felt that the consequences of an incident involving a vehicle travelling at 60mph would be more severe than that involving a vehicle travelling at 50mph; a concern supported in the literature which demonstrates increased collision risk with increased vehicle speed (e.g. Elvik, Christensen and Amundsen, 2004). Despite the findings from the on-road trial showing no evidence of increased safety risk, it is clear there is a need to address operatives' concerns about the perceived safety impact of a 60mph speed limit on incident severity.

“It doesn't matter how you try and mould it or look at it or put it into the equation...you couldn't come up with the fact that it is the safer arrangement.”

“I was worried about the recovery lads, to be honest, watching on the camera...it only takes one idiot to just not be looking what you're doing or be on his phone, swerve...the difference between 50 mph and 60 mph is quite a bit at that speed.”

3.2.2 *Speed differentials and lane changes are central to on-road risk*

The on-road trial examined average traffic speeds and so did not provide evidence on the impact of the 60mph speed limit on speed differentials between different vehicle classes. However, the MSA survey asked about the behaviour of other drivers in the 50mph link (Junction 34 to 35) and the 60mph link (Junction 35 to 35a). Comparisons between these two links showed that there were fewer concerns with overtaking manoeuvres, performed by all three user groups (cars, vans and HGVs), in the 60mph speed limit compared with the 50mph speed limit. Possibly, the 60mph speed limit helped to reduce these behaviours, or reduce the *perceived* conflict between different types of vehicle. However, although reported close following by car and van drivers was slightly lower in the 60mph speed limit, similar levels of close following by HGV drivers was reported by survey respondents in the both the 50mph and 60mph speed limits.

This topic of speed variance between different classes of vehicles was discussed by participants during the focus group. The speed differential between vehicle types was perceived as a key factor relevant to incident risk; in particular it was perceived that speed differentials can lead to increased lane changing. Participants typically thought that the variance in speed would be greater at 60mph than at 50mph. Differences in driving style were expected to be exacerbated when the speed limit was 60mph, as some drivers would drive more cautiously and others more confidently. Drivers who prefer to drive at higher

speeds were predicted to become frustrated by those who prefer to drive at 50mph due to a perceived lack of confidence.

Conversely, the speed differentials between cars and HGVs were hoped and expected to be improved by a speed limit of 60mph, as it was perceived that car speeds would be closer to those of HGVs being driven at the limiter. This was seen as the only possible positive of introducing a 60mph speed limit; HGVs overtaking other vehicles was perceived as a leading cause of collisions.

The perceived issues about speed differentials and lane changing underpinned participants' concerns that the 60mph speed limit increased collision risk. Although the on-trial provided evidence to suggest that the 60mph speed limit did not increase the risk of collisions or incursions into the TM, it was not able to provide evidence on the impact of the 60mph speed limit on lane changing behaviour. In the absence of data, participants may remain sceptical about the safety of a 60mph speed limit in roadworks. This again shows the importance of addressing stakeholder perceptions of risk.

“In a 50, everyone’s going pretty much around 50.”

“There’s still people doing 50. When the people behind them want them to do 60 then they can’t and it causes more lane changing.”

“There are a lot of people in roadworks that see cones and then they slow down. There’s as many as want to go quickly, and there are a lot of people who haven’t got a lot of confidence. And once you start increasing those differentials between what some people are driving at and others, you increase headways, but also frustration from the drivers that can’t get past them.”

“If you go through the statistics for all the RTCs we’ve had in the three years we’ve been here, probably 90%, that’s not an exaggeration, will be lorries changing lane, from lane one to two, lane two to lane three.”

“Because [HGVs] can’t go above 56; cars are doing 56 or a little bit more...that is the plus side.”

“It’s traffic changing between lanes that tends to cause a lot more of the accidents, and if they’re all restricted to running in one lane, we find it’s a safer environment to work in.”

3.2.3 *Impact of 60mph speed limit on working practices*

Most participants did not report any changes to working practices during the 60mph trial. However, the perception that a 60mph speed limit reduced safety was reflected in some participants' reports of working practices during the trial. The ways in which some tasks were carried out were adapted to mitigate the apparent increased risk. This was reported in particular by operatives involved in live lane working; strategies included reducing the number of live lanes and requesting Traffic Officer support to reduce traffic speeds. By contrast, organisations such as the police, who typically attend incidents after traffic speeds have significantly reduced, did not tend to change their ways of working.

None of the participants reported any events or experiences that diminished their safety during the trial. Although there is no evidence that safety was reduced, the few reported

adaptations to working practices support the finding that perceptions of safety among operatives were impacted by the trial.

“More activities were moved to nights so that we could reduce the number of live lanes and, therefore, increase the safety of the workers.”

“We’ve had a few live lane breakdowns in the 60 mph zone. We tended to request HETO support a bit more purely to...slow the traffic down.”

“Generally, [when police officers] get to an incident, the traffic’s almost stopped and they allow the traffic officer guys on. Mostly, by the time we get to it...we’re very often working in a sterile environment.”

3.2.4 Perceived implications for the prioritisation and advancement of safety

Safety was described as the highest priority when working on-road. Participants cited initiatives aimed at embedding safety-related attitudes and behaviour (e.g. ‘don’t walk by’) and commended the improvements to road worker safety that have been made over recent years. However, they felt that a 60mph speed limit contradicted existing safety-related messages and initiatives, and felt that it represented a step backwards. In addition, one participant felt that workers would perceive there were different levels of acceptable risk for different work activities. Workers who are on-road during the commissioning phase were predicted to be dissatisfied about working in apparently riskier conditions than the workers undertaking other tasks.

This further supports the finding that, although the on-road trial found no evidence of a negative impact on safety, a 60mph speed limit was still *perceived* as a threat to safety, to the extent to which safety is considered important in the industry, and to the progress that has been made to date. Interventions may be required to address how a 60mph speed limit in roadworks aligns with values such as ‘Aiming for Zero’, and to ensure that all operatives feel equally protected from harm.

“I think it’s everybody’s paramount that they want to see people going to work and come home safely at night.”

“I think it’s a bit contradictory because continually on these schemes we’re being asked...to deliver schemes safer, and then...it’s well, ‘we’re going to do this’ which sets an alarm off in everybody’s head, ‘well, this isn’t safer’.”

“I think we’ve made great progress in those last 16 years, and this just seems a bit of a step backwards.”

“They’re going to say to me, ‘well, how comes when they’re doing the civils, they can have it at 50, yet when I’m out there doing my commissioning, it’s 60 mph. Why should they be safer than me?’”

“You’re enforcing different levels of risk to different activities almost.”

3.2.5 Perceived trade-off between road worker safety and road user satisfaction

Average journey times observed during the on-road trial were calculated using the length of the link and the average speed of vehicles travelling between Junction 32 and 35a. The

introduction of the 60mph speed limit was estimated to have saved customers, on average, 34 seconds in journey time. The MSA survey, which was conducted with road users who drove through the roadworks during the trial, found that customers perceived the 60mph speed limit positively, in terms of overall satisfaction and perceptions of journey time.

Some participants in the focus group questioned whether this small improvement in journey time (34 seconds) for road users was worth the perceived increase in risk to those working on road. One participant was surprised that road users only saved an average of 34 seconds during the trial period, although others noted that when multiplied by the thousands of drivers who travel through the scheme each day, the total time savings are substantial. Nevertheless, some participants felt that the journey time reduction was too small to rationalise exposing operatives to a higher level of risk, and others felt that *any* increase in risk to operatives was unjustifiable.

One participant suggested that negative public perception of the impact of speed limits on journey time was the real problem, with journey times actually being better in 50mph enforced speed limit sections than in 70mph sections (providing there were no incidents). The introduction of a 60mph speed limit may therefore lead operatives to feel that their safety is being reduced for a small or no benefit to road users. It may be necessary to estimate and communicate the likely daily or weekly benefit of the 60mph speed limit on journey time and to address perceptions about reductions to operative safety. Justifying why the 60mph speed limit is preferable to public perception strategies may also be required.

“34 seconds...it should be even more quicker, or it’s not worth it.”

“2,000 vehicles an hour...it becomes a significant amount of time.”

“Well, you’re putting someone’s life at risk then for 34 seconds...aren’t you, really?”

“I think the big problem is you’re dealing with public perception here, aren’t you?...when we’ve had roadworks on the M1, 50 mph-enforced speed limit...the journey time is better than when you’ve got 70 in congestion. For three years now, the M1, on this section, your journey time’s been better, incidents apart.”

3.3 Theme 3: Workers perceive problems with driver awareness

The on-road trial found that although the speed limit increased by 10mph (from 50mph to 60mph), the increase in average speed was only around 3.5mph. This suggests that while some drivers noticed the change in speed limit it is likely that many missed the change and continued to drive around 50mph; hence, the overall average speed was substantially lower than the speed limit.

The focus group participants were typically unsurprised by this finding, having observed themselves that drivers generally drove at speeds lower than the speed limit. One explanation was that there was no visible change in the driving environment between the 50mph and 60mph sections (other than the speed limit signs), and therefore it was felt that drivers may not have expected a different speed limit. There was a common perception in the group that motorists are not sufficiently aware of their surroundings. Participants felt that drivers did not, generally, read speed limit signs and therefore did not notice the speed

limit increase during the trial. Drivers were also described as being ‘unaware of the dangers’ of motorways and being motivated by efficiency – getting from A to B as quickly as possible – rather than safety. It was felt that the general public do not appreciate the risks involved in working on-road, and that their perceptions and behaviour might be different if they did.

In the case of this on-road trial, drivers’ apparent lack of awareness of their surroundings was not perceived to have a negative impact on safety; in fact, one participant attributed the lower than expected number of incidents observed during the trial to drivers not realising that the speed was 60mph. However, the wider implication of this view is that if drivers are not suitably aware of their surroundings, they are less able to respond quickly and appropriately to the driving situation. This relates to Theme 2; if a driver does not react quickly enough and an incident occurs, the impact of that incident is expected to be more severe at 60mph than at 50mph. This view of driver awareness may also explain why one participant said they would be even more concerned about a change in speed limit within the roadworks if the speed limit change was a step-down from 60mph to 50mph (rather than the step-up tested in the trial).

These findings suggest that it may be important to consider how to effectively implement educational campaigns and the provision of information about future speed limit changes at roadworks, so as to maximise driver awareness and minimise the concerns of operatives.

“I expected there to be more incidents, to be honest, with the speed increase. But I think a lot of it was I don’t think people really realised it was 60 mph.”

“A lot of people drive with tunnel vision. They don’t see what’s around them; all they see is what’s in front of them. Their aim is to get through these roadworks and get to their destination.”

“Nobody reads a sign, so if you’re going faster to slower, then you’d have a real big problem.”

“I think asking the public if it’s safer or not, that isn’t the question they should be asked because they will always say ‘yes, it is’ because they’re going a bit quicker.”

“Some of the things and accidents I see happen, and stuff that’s literally just caused by people driving like idiots, if people...could see them videos, that would change the way they drive.”

3.4 Theme 4: Workers perceive a need for better public engagement

Participants in the focus group acknowledged that a key motivation behind implementing the 60mph speed limit at roadworks is to reduce driver frustration and improve customer satisfaction. However, similar to the issues discussed in Theme 2 and 3, participants typically felt that it was more important to tackle misconceptions about roadworks, on-road risk and the role of road workers, than to focus on improving journey time. It was felt that safety needed to be central to communications with road users, and that an increase in the speed limit could send the wrong message. Participants described receiving abuse from road users and suggested that increasing knowledge of the role of road workers could improve road user attitudes and behaviour. Some key points which participants suggested should be communicated to road users included:

- Speed restrictions can have a positive impact on journey time
- Recovery workers help to clear incidents and reduce delays
- Road workers play a role in making roads better and safer for motorists
- Explanations when there are roadworks but no workers on road

It was felt that Highways England should engage with motorists using social media as this is where people commonly seek information.

The findings suggest that operatives may feel that communication strategies are more likely to improve driver perceptions and encourage safer driving than a 60mph speed limit in roadworks.

“The travelling public’s perception is there’s roadworks out there and there’s nobody working...would it not be safer for everybody if there was more education?...’well, actually, you might think that there’s nothing going on, but we’re doing this. This is what we’re doing; that’s what we’re doing’.”

“There’s a danger here of giving people the target that they’re trying to achieve. But what we should be selling it as driving safer, not driving faster.”

“If we could say...that ‘your journey time, in actual fact, in roadworks, if it’s monitored and you don’t get an incident, it’s all better’.”

“They need more awareness...What actually road workers are there for. And at the end of the day, it’s for their safety. Better roads and safe roads.”

“[Social media is] where people look now. They pick that up and they want to know what’s happening. And it’s all about telling people what’s happening, why there’s a speed limit.”

3.5 Theme 5: Workers questioned the trial method and findings

The validity of the trial findings were questioned by participants, due to beliefs about the duration and timing of the trial and concerns about the wider rollout of 60mph speed limits. These concerns are discussed in the following sections.

3.5.1 Duration and timing of the trial

The on-road trial found that the increase in average speed associated with the 60mph speed limit was 3.5mph. As discussed under Theme 3, participants felt that drivers do not immediately notice changes to their surroundings, such as road signs. As the trial took place over a two-week period, the ‘true’ impact of the 60mph speed limit on average speeds was perceived to be unknown by the focus group participants. Participants believed that a longer trial would allow an assessment of driver behaviour once all drivers were aware of the new speed limit. Participants stated that they expected average speeds would have been substantially higher had the trial ran for longer.

The time of year at which the trial was conducted was also considered to be a biasing factor in the average traffic speed. One participant commented that the traffic volume was higher leading up to Christmas, meaning that the speeds of traffic were typically slower than usual.

Further evidence from other on-road and simulator trials may help to provide assurance to stakeholders that the findings from the M1 J32-35a on-road trial are robust.

“I don’t think it was on long enough or the distance was long enough. People use that section of motorway every day. It probably would have taken them a week to realise.”

“I don’t think most people even realised it was 60 mph...So if it had been over a longer period of time, I think that would have seen a difference in behaviour of drivers they wouldn’t have been doing 60, they’d have been doing 65, 68.”

3.5.2 *Concerns about wider rollout*

Although the 60mph speed limit is intended to only be implemented in the commissioning phase of Major Scheme roadworks, most participants either misunderstood the intended implementation or were sceptical about it. There were numerous criticisms of the trial design, some related to concerns about a wider rollout of 60mph speed limits in roadworks. Some participants anticipated that 60mph speed limits would be adopted throughout entire schemes across the whole network; this may have influenced their views of the appropriateness of the speed limit. As such, some participants felt that the trial took place in a location that was unusually low-risk and so felt that the trial findings were biased and likely to be positive. Similarly, the phase of the scheme was viewed as unusually quiet in terms of road worker presence, and so participants felt that the findings of the on-road trial were not generalisable to other phases or locations in the scheme, or to other schemes.

Among those participants who correctly understood the intended implementation of the 60mph speed limit, a few still suggested that the trial design may have been biased so that positive results were almost inevitable. The decision to conduct the trial on a low-incident section of motorway during a quiet phase of the scheme was also perceived to be politically motivated; that is, to allow 60mph speed limits to be rolled out more widely.

As such, although the results of the trial found no evidence that safety was adversely affected during the trial, stakeholders in the focus group had concerns with the robustness of the trial, and therefore did not believe the findings were an accurate representation of the implementation of a 60mph speed limit. In addition, operatives’ experience of working on-road while the 60mph speed limit was in place may have been influenced by their pre-conceived beliefs about it being implemented more widely. While they may not have had any direct negative experiences during the trial, reflecting on how events may have unfolded under different circumstances may have impacted upon their overall working experience and perceptions of safety.

“You can’t just say it’s one size fits all. You’ve got to look at the location, the previous incidents that you’ve got there, lots of other factors are thrown in really. It’s a very small sample.”

“If you’d have done this 18 months ago in that section when we’d got 60 blokes working in there on a daily basis, I think it would have been a completely different set-up.”

“It was a perfect storm, wasn’t it? There was no-one working, cones there, it was a relatively quiet section of motorway, and they obviously thought, ‘right, we need to do this, we need to do this in a place where it works’.”

“[Perhaps] this is a sort of back-door way of bringing it in and saying ‘look, it’s worked there, it’s worked there’...is this a step towards the general increase in speed limits across the board with roadworks?”

4 Summary and recommendations

This report summarises the findings from a focus group with 10 representatives from the highways industry who had experience working in or around the roadworks between Junction 32 and 35a of the M1 during the on-road pilot of a 60mph speed limit.

This qualitative study recruited a small sample of individuals and sought to obtain in-depth feedback on the 60mph speed limit pilot scheme and the views and perceptions of industry stakeholders on future implementation of 60mph speed limits at roadworks. The views expressed by the participants of this focus group relate to their experiences of the trial on the M1 J32-35a scheme and as such may not be generalisable to trials on other schemes. Further, the opinions expressed by these individuals are not necessarily representative of all individuals who worked on road during the trial, or those who work on road at other schemes on the Strategic Road Network. Nevertheless, the findings collated in this report supplement and enrich the quantitative analysis of road user behaviour and safety performed as part of the on-road trial (see Wallbank *et al.*, 2016).

The detailed perspectives provided by participants of this focus group highlight some of the issues that can arise in the implementation of a 60mph speed limit in roadworks. They also provide important points for consideration in future trials of alternative speed limits. The key findings may be summarised as follows:

- Individuals who work on road seek clear, consistent and timely communication about the implementation of a higher speed limit
- Significant concerns and a perceived reduction in safety, particularly with regard to incident severity, may remain even with a lack of trial evidence that risk is increased by implementing a 60mph speed limit
- Operatives may view a 60mph speed limit in roadworks as a threat to the prioritisation of road worker safety and to the advancements in safety that have been made to date
- Operatives' opinions of a new speed limit are influenced by their perceptions of how aware drivers are and whether driver responses to a change in speed limit will be appropriate
- Some operatives have misunderstood or doubted the intended implementation of the 60mph speed limit, leading to questions about the validity of research findings
- Operatives view public education and awareness as a higher priority than customer satisfaction, with safety being a central message
- Expectations about changes in traffic behaviour resulting from a 60mph speed limit may lead to changes in working practices, such as shifting tasks to night time

The findings of this research are consistent with those of the Annual Stakeholder Perception Survey, which TRL developed for Highways England to provide insight into stakeholder relationships and the strategies needed to improve them (Durrell, Posner, Fernández-Medina, Davidson, Millard, Parkinson *et al.*, 2017). Respondents of this survey represented a wide range of industries and organisation types, including supply chain and emergency services. Among the key findings were the following:

- Lack of early consultation
 - Recommendation to regularly engage with stakeholders via forums or working groups to discuss strategic matters and projects
- Fragmented communication with stakeholders that leaves them without up to date information on progress
 - Recommendation to assign relationship managers or a main point of contact who will be responsible for gaining a better understanding of stakeholders and build stronger relationships.

This suggests that concerns about the quality and timeliness of communication with stakeholders may not be specific to the on-road trial of the 60mph speed limit and are shared by a range of stakeholders. As such the recommendations from the Annual Stakeholder Perception Survey may also be relevant to the management of relationships with stakeholders involved in the speed limit pilot schemes.

It is recommended that the findings from this focus group study are considered alongside the other findings from the on-road pilot on the M1 J32-35a scheme as well as evidence from the other research activities (such as the Stakeholder Perception Survey). Further speed limit trials are also underway at other schemes on the SRN which will generate further evidence. The findings from all speed limit pilot schemes will be collated in the final report for this project so as to enable holistic evidence-based recommendations to be made for Highways England.

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Monitoring and evaluation of the 55/60mph pilots



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