

## **CLIENT PROJECT REPORT CPR2449**

### Monitoring and evaluation of the 55/60mph pilots

Results from stakeholder engagement following the on-road trial  
of 60mph on the M5 J4a-6 scheme

A Tailor

## Report details

<b>Report prepared for:</b>	Highways England, Roadworks and Improvement Division		
<b>Project/customer reference:</b>	11224238		
<b>Copyright:</b>	© TRL Limited		
<b>Report date:</b>	26 May 2017		
<b>Report status/version:</b>	Version 1		
<b>Quality approval:</b>			
S Clark (Project Manager)		G Beard (Technical Reviewer)	

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## Contents amendment record

This report has been amended and issued as follows:

<b>Version</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Editor</b>	<b>Technical Reviewer</b>
1.0	26/05/17	First draft	AT	GB

<b>Document last saved on:</b>	31/07/2017 09:08
<b>Document last saved by:</b>	Caroline Wallbank

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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 four representatives from the highways industry who had experience working in or around the roadworks during the on-road pilot of 60mph at the M5 J4a-6 scheme during March 2017. 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 four key themes, which generated a number of key findings:

- Operatives may initially have concerns about the 60mph speed limit in roadworks due to a perceived increase in risk to their safety
- Perceived improvements in driver behaviour and incident frequency may lead to more favourable opinions on a 60mph speed limit in roadworks
- Operatives who work at high speeds in live lanes perceive working in an environment with this speed limit as ‘business as usual’
- Concerns about striking cones at high speeds may lead to changes in safe working practices, such as requesting closures and requiring more recovery workers for a HGV recovery task
- Specific aspects of the trial environment should be considered when judging the safety of a 60mph speed limit
- Misconceptions about the intended implementation of the 60mph speed limit may impact upon views about the validity and generalisability of the trial findings
- Operatives perceive a need for better public engagement in relation to speed limit pilots, speed limits on the whole, and information provision to drivers more generally

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 M5 J4a-6 scheme. It is recommended that the focus group findings are considered alongside these on-road trial findings as well as evidence from the earlier pilot schemes on the M1 (J32-35a) and A1 (Leeming to Barton).

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## 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 a 60mph speed limit was conducted at the M5 Junction 4a-6 scheme in March 2017, during the operational testing phase of Smart Motorway development. The trial involved implementation of a 60mph speed limit on part of the scheme on the southbound carriageway; drivers travelling on this part of the scheme experienced a 'step down' in speed limit from 60mph to 50mph.

This on-road trial sought to understand whether or not the change in speed limit 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 with local 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 were no safety issues identified from the incidents and incursions data provided by the scheme. Despite the increase in average speeds (to between 56 and 58mph) observed on-road, the survey results indicated that some drivers still missed the change in speed limit.

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 M5 Junction 4a to 6 scheme'* (Wallbank, Chowdhury, et al., 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 M5 J4a-6 scheme. This document reports on the focus group and its key findings, examining the perspectives of operatives working on-road 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

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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 ensures that the group dynamics are managed appropriately and that the discussion is 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 four representatives were available to participate in the focus group; the sample included individuals from across the industry including traffic management, vehicle recovery, enforcement and operations.

### **2.3 Focus group format**

The focus group was attended by two researchers from TRL, who jointly facilitated the discussion and 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, Chowdhury, *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. The topic guide was closely aligned with that used in the M1 J32a-35a stakeholder focus group (see Taylor, 2017b), with only the presentation of the trial results differing. 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
<b>Overview of the trial</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Depiction of speed limits on the dates</li> <li>• Dates of the baseline and trial periods</li> </ul>	Presentation by TRL
<b>Discussion of expectations</b>	Group discussion
<b>Presentation of the trial results</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impact of 60mph speed limit on:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ average speed</li> <li>○ speed compliance</li> <li>○ headway</li> <li>○ close following</li> <li>○ incidents</li> <li>○ journey time</li> <li>○ customer satisfaction</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Presentation by TRL
<b>Discussion of participants' experiences</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thoughts on the trial results</li> <li>• Working during the trial</li> <li>• Safety</li> <li>• Driver behaviour</li> <li>• Challenges</li> <li>• Benefits</li> <li>• Disbenefits</li> <li>• Future implementation</li> </ul>	Group discussion

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## 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):

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.

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## 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: Operatives' perceptions of the 60mph speed limit improved after the trial

Participants described having concerns about the 60mph speed limit prior to the trial, but felt more positive about it during and after the trial.

#### 3.1.1 *Initial concerns about safety*

Participants described having a number of safety concerns before the trial began. In particular, participants were apprehensive about an increase in risk resulting from the higher speeds, particularly because their work puts them in close proximity with moving traffic. They also expected that actual speeds would be higher than the 60mph speed limit, based on current perceptions of speed compliance on motorways. There were particular concerns relating to the location of the trial; the topography of the southbound carriageway was described as creating "a lot of room for people to comfortably increase in speed". Overall, while improvements in traffic flow were perceived to be a 'nice to have', operative safety was viewed as paramount.

"We know from personal experience, 50mph doesn't mean 50mph and 60mph doesn't mean 60mph. So, we weren't keen at first."

#### 3.1.2 *Perceived positive impact on incidents*

Participants perceived that within 50mph speed limit roadworks, incidents typically resulted from the speed differentials between HGVs (driven at the maximum speed allowed by speed limiter devices - approximately 56mph) and slower moving cars. It was felt that HGV drivers 'hogged' lanes, tailgated cars, and forced car drivers to drive faster. The majority of recoveries following incidents were perceived to be a result of either HGVs shunting cars, or cars trying to "get out of the way" of HGVs. Conversely, when the 60mph speed limit was in place, close following by HGVs was perceived to be less frequent (this was supported by the on-road trial findings), leading to fewer incidents and recoveries.

Participants perceived that the 60mph speed limit could assist with maintaining a constant traffic flow, which in turn would help to minimise the number of collisions.

"The majority of our work when it comes to RTAs would maybe be a shunt from a heavy, a heavy would shunt a car or cars would be trying to get out of the way of heavies and that was void within the 60mph test limit. So, yes, the change was drastic, and my opinion kind of changed. All of my team actually, we only had positive feedback about the 60mph speed limit."

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### **3.1.3** *Perceived positive impact on driver perceptions and experience*

Participants also perceived that the 60mph speed limit led to improvements in driver behaviour because driver perceptions and experiences were more positive. It was felt that changes in HGV behaviour (as described above) allowed car drivers to choose their lane and to manoeuvre more freely. In addition, driver behaviour was viewed as more “mellow” at a 60mph speed limit because drivers were travelling at speeds closer to the normal motorway speed limit of 70mph and so were less frustrated.

There was also a perceived improvement in satisfaction among customers requiring vehicle recovery. According to the recovery operative, better traffic flow led to faster response times, which resulted in an enhanced customer experience. It is important to note that this improvement was attributed not only to the increased speed limit but also to the wider lanes, which was described as allowing more room for manoeuvre in Lane 1. This suggests that this participant was comparing the trial phase to earlier phases of the scheme in which the lanes were also narrowed. Nevertheless, the 60mph speed limit was perceived by both recovery operatives and their customers as favourable to response times.

“[Customers would] give positive feedback on reaction times and...we’d always make conversation, “Oh, yes, they’ve opened it up to 60mph for a trial period” and they will always say, “Oh, yes. I wish all the roadworks were 60mph.”

### **3.1.4** *Perceptions of 60mph speed limits in roadworks became more positive following the trial*

Participants discussed a change in their perceptions of the 60mph speed limit following the trial. Their experiences and observations of driver behaviour during the trial were described as more positive than expected (e.g. more incidents were anticipated than were actually observed), and therefore their opinions became more favourable. While participants felt that topography and road layout remained a challenge for future trials, all said they would be comfortable with working in or around other road works with 60mph speed limits in the future.

“If you can keep a constant flow, then it’s always going to help. So, if the 60mph assists in that, then that’s great.”

“I think we were concerned that that extra 10mph might make a difference, but because it didn’t really, as in more accidents or we didn’t actually witness bad behaviour, I suppose it’s made people more confident that that extra 10mph didn’t really make that much of a difference to our safety.”

## **3.2 Theme 2: There were some changes to working practices as a result of the trial but these were not considered substantial**

Participants typically did not perceive a need to change their safe working practices, but there were a few tasks which were carried out differently as a result of a perceived increase in risk.

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### **3.2.1** *Operating under a 60mph speed limit was mostly perceived as 'business as usual'*

Operatives commonly said that they were used to working at high speeds in live lanes, and that the 60mph speed limit did not present any particular issues. Undertaking rolling closures with a 60mph speed limit in place was described as “run of the mill” with no additional procedures for safety required.

Recovery operatives were issued with a new risk assessment and method statement (RAMS) and new procedures. This included changes to plans about how and when to request traffic officer support, how to position the IPV and how to operate in Lanes 1 and 2. This was described as a collaborative process between the operations team, recovery drivers, Highways England and the police. Making these changes to the RAMS was perceived to be no more onerous than those associated with any other change to the working environment.

### **3.2.2** *Concerns about striking cones at higher speeds led to some changes in working practices*

Participants discussed some changes to the ways in which tasks were carried out due to a perceived increase in risk associated with striking cones at higher speeds. The impact of cones being dispersed was perceived as the “main safety issue”; specifically, there was a concern that the road danger lamps would travel further following a cone strike. Operatives who were required to pull into the closure discussed the ways in which they mitigated this risk.

When pulling into (and out of) the works lane in heavy TM vehicles, there was a perceived issue with slowing down (and speeding up) sufficiently when the speed limit was 60mph. To pull into the closure, participants perceived that they needed to slow down a lot earlier and that this created a backlog of traffic; they believed that if they did not slow down to at least 50mph, they would strike multiple cones. This meant that operatives requested traffic officers assistance more frequently to mitigate the risks.

There were also changes to the number of drivers involved on a HGV recovery job. A smaller recovery vehicle was reportedly sent out first to investigate the incident before requesting a heavy recovery vehicle or IPV, so that they could find out about the incident without using a large recovery vehicle which could create a further hazard. Although an additional driver was required, this was not perceived to increase the workload associated with conducting a recovery. Recovery operatives were also described as requesting more assistance from traffic officers when recovering HGVs, although this was related to a perception that the cones were closer together during the trial. Road blocks were requested to allow HGV recovery vehicles in and out of the closure accordingly.

“When you’re doing 60mph and you’re trying to maintain that speed, you’re having to slow down a lot earlier and that creates problems for the normal traffic...if I’m anything above 50mph, I’m taking out 10 or 11 cones with me.”

“We’re actually doubling up on drivers. Send one driver out with a smaller vehicle, so he’s not going to create a hazard, pull in, speak to the driver of that vehicle and then either call the heavy or the IPV.”

### 3.2.3 *Rolling closures were easier at 60mph*

One participant stated that it was easier to conduct a rolling closure in the 60mph speed limit. The traffic was described as “bunched up” under a 50mph speed limit but more dispersed under a 60mph speed limit. As such, the participant felt that this made it easier to find a space in the traffic to begin undertaking the rolling closure. The other participants did not challenge this perception.

“It’s easier because everything’s spread out a little bit more for us in the 60mph, that we can find a gap in-between a particular heavy and then bring everything behind and slowing.”

## 3.3 **Theme 3: Perceptions of a 60mph speed limit were influenced by perceptions of the trial itself**

While participants had positive opinions of the 60mph speed limit on the M5 at J4a-6 southbound, they felt that the trial location and its specific features were a key factor in determining the appropriateness of this speed limit in roadworks. There were also some misconceptions about the intended future implementation of 60mph speed limits in roadworks.

### 3.3.1 *Perception of the trial location as lower risk*

Participants perceived that the southbound carriageway was considerably less hazardous than the northbound carriageway between these junctions. Several reasons were discussed:

- The northbound carriageway has significant bends and travels uphill, causing HGVs to slow down
- On the northbound carriageway, drivers are uncertain about which lane they should be in to join the M42
- Drivers travelling southbound are typically seen as more relaxed (e.g. going to the south west on holiday), while drivers travelling northbound are seen as more stressed (e.g. travelling to work)
- There have been multiple serious RTCs (prior to the trial) on the northbound carriageway that have led to road closures

Participants therefore anticipated that the trial findings, including specific data on speed and headway, would have been different had the pilot been conducted on the northbound carriageway rather than the southbound carriageway.

“South, it was the easiest part to actually pick. I think if you had done, definitely, from Junction 5 to Junction 4A, your accident rate would have been a lot different to what it is showing, definitely, because of the road layout.”

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### **3.3.2** *Misconceptions about the intended future implementation of 60mph speed limits*

There was a perception that the TM and lane width were favourable at the trial location, and that these factors should be considered when deciding whether it is appropriate to implement a 60mph speed limit at other locations. In particular, participants felt that it would be too dangerous to increase the speed limit to 60mph speed limit in works using contraflow and where the lanes were narrowed.

On the other hand, participants expected that the next phase of trials would involve piloting a 60mph speed limit on earlier phases in the schemes when there is more road worker activity and narrow lanes are used. As such, there was a perception that the trial findings were limited in their validity and that the 60mph speed limit needed to be piloted in more challenging environments to obtain stronger evidence of its effects. In addition, participants perceived that problems with driver behaviour were caused by different schemes having different speed limits, and that consistency across schemes could improve driver perceptions and behaviour.

While participants acknowledged that the 60mph speed limit would not be applied universally, these comments suggest that participants may not have been aware of its intended future implementation (i.e. in the operational testing phase only).

“[60mph in a] Contraflow, I think, is just a fatal waiting to happen.”

“All the roads have widened, so you’re getting a false sense of trial, so to speak. You’ve trialled it on, say, a standard closure as a temporary closure, because technically you’re only taking one lane out. You’ve given them all the rest that they would have had anyway.”

“It’s not a blanket option, I don’t think, the 60mph. I think it is a very pick and choose wisely.”

## **3.4** **Theme 4: There was a perceived need for better public engagement**

Public engagement was a key area of discussion in the focus group. Participants felt that communication with the public was important both with respect to the speed limit pilot as well as more generally.

### **3.4.1** *Communicating why speed restrictions remain in the commissioning phase*

Some participants perceived a need to explain to drivers why speed restrictions – whether a 50mph or 60mph speed limit – remain in place in the commissioning phase of the scheme. It was felt that when encountering a motorway with four lanes running and no works activity, public perception of speed restrictions was negative. Without an obvious reason for them, speed restrictions were seen to be perceived by the public as a measure to simply irritate motorists. This was supported by the customer satisfaction survey data, which indicated that some drivers were dissatisfied with speed restrictions while there were no road workers present, and with the length of the roadworks when some sections appeared to be complete. Participants felt that explaining that restrictions were necessary while checking that the system was working would help to improve drivers’ views and experiences.

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“[It's] just to make sure everything works, etc. etc. but for the public it suddenly opens, it's lovely shiny tarmac, there are lovely shiny gantries, etc. etc. but we're still in roadworks. It's almost, persecute the motorist here...Let's just be awkward for awkward's sake.”

### **3.4.2 Informing the public about the speed limit pilot**

Participants felt that the public should have been informed about the speed limit pilot, citing several issues.

Firstly, related to the points described in section 3.4.1, participants felt that drivers did not know why there was a step down from 60mph to 50mph because there was no observable change in the road environment. This reduction in speed limit was anticipated to have been perceived negatively in the absence of any explanation (although no evidence of this emerged from the customer satisfaction survey data).

Secondly, participants perceived that drivers do not always observe signs and signals and therefore some drivers probably missed the speed limit change (an assumption which was supported by the on-road trial findings). One participant commented that roads are 'learnt' by drivers and therefore drivers may encounter the new signs several times before they attend to and respond to them.

Thirdly, the speed limit on the trial section was described as changing repeatedly over a short period of time (i.e. 50mph before the trial, 60mph during the trial, 50mph after the trial and 70mph after the completion of the commissioning phase). This was perceived as confusing for drivers.

Participants perceived that publicity about the speed limit pilot would have made drivers more aware and certain of the new speed limit, resulting in more drivers increasing their speed in response to the 60mph speed limit. It was therefore felt that an increase in awareness would have allowed a more valid observation of driver responses to the 60mph speed limit. Participants suggested that this should be undertaken for future trials of a 60mph speed limit in roadworks.

“The first few days no one changed speed and then as it progressed, people had learnt that it was a 60mph and that's when you started to get that positive reading. So, I think, it's definitely a case of knowing and learning the road that you're using.

“I think we'd have probably got a more honest view of what was actually going on with driver behaviour if it had been publicised more, because more people would have been driving at 60mph.”

### **3.4.3 Informing drivers about incidents in roadworks**

Participants described feeling more exposed to risk during incidents in roadworks without the 'normal' signs and signals<sup>1</sup> to alert drivers. Accordingly, they described having used IPVs to protect themselves in these instances during the trial. Participants suggested using

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<sup>1</sup> Specific signs and signals were not identified.

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portable VMS in future trials to warn drivers about incidents, particularly in 60mph speed limit sections where they could provide “a bit more security”.

“I don’t know whether it’s possible to get portable VMSs in some of the roadworks more now? I’ve seen them about more and they can be utilised. Whether we could utilise them for incident usage... Being in a 60mph zone, it just gives us a bit more security, that there’s something else there to give a bit of comfort.”

#### **3.4.4 Improving speed limit compliance through communication strategies**

Participants were unsure whether changes in enforcement were necessary if 60mph speed limits were to be implemented in roadworks. However, speed compliance in general was discussed at length, with participants describing a need for effective deterrents to reduce speeding. This was perceived to be particularly important on roads where the speed cameras do not cover all lanes.

Suggestions were made relating to the use of communications to support speed enforcement, such as using VMS to highlight the number of drivers who have been prosecuted for speeding within that section, and using signage with a personal angle to promote road worker safety (e.g. “Dave’s dad works here”). Enforcement itself was expected to become relatively easy with the use of the available technology (i.e. HADECS).

Participants perceived that recent media campaigns around ‘red X’ compliance on Smart Motorways had led to reductions in incorrect lane use, and expected that speed-related media campaigns would lead to similar improvements in speed compliance.

In addition, roadworks were seen to affect driver behaviour on other, unrestricted sections of motorway on the driver’s route; participants felt that although drivers may comply with speed limits while in the road works, a feeling of being delayed by the roadworks may lead them to exceed the speed limit once downstream. Participants perceived that publicity about journey time savings associated with the 60mph speed limit (e.g. 30 to 40 seconds according to the on-road trial findings) would improve driver perceptions of journey times and delays, and therefore improve speed choice and compliance.

#### **3.4.5 Keeping drivers informed generally**

Participants discussed a general need for better communication with drivers. There was a perception that the public wants more and better information, and wants to feel “more involved”. For example, one participant said that drivers wanted to be alerted to incidents within roadworks in advance so they were prepared for a reduction in the speed limit. Multiple options for communicating with the public were suggested, including:

- VMS
- Information leaflets at motorway service areas
- Highways England information screens at motorway service areas
- Social media

In addition, Highways England was seen as “behind” in terms of promoting itself and its Traffic Officer Service compared with other organisations.

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## 4 Summary and recommendations

This report summarises the findings from a focus group with four representatives from the highways industry who had experience working in or around the roadworks between Junction 4a and 6 of the M5 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 related to their experiences of the trial on the M5 J4a-6 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, Chowdhury, *et al.*, 2017).

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:

- Operatives may initially have concerns about the 60mph speed limit in roadworks due to a perceived increase in risk to their safety (although opinions changed following perceived improvements in driver behaviour and incident frequency in the 60mph speed limit)
- On the whole, operatives who work at high speeds in live lanes perceive working in an environment with this speed limit as 'business as usual'
- Concerns about striking cones at higher speeds may lead to changes in safe working practices, such as requesting closures and involving more recovery workers on a HGV recovery job
- Specific aspects of the trial environment should be considered when judging the safety of a 60mph speed limit
- Misconceptions about the intended implementation of the 60mph speed limit may be related to views about the validity and generalisability of the trial findings
- Operatives perceive a need for better public engagement in relation to speed limit pilots, speed limits on the whole, and information provision to drivers more generally

There are several common themes between the current findings and those of the M1 32-35a stakeholder engagement focus group (see Taylor, 2017):

- Operatives viewed their safety as paramount and were initially concerned about an increase in risk to those working on road during the 60mph speed limit pilot
- Operatives perceived problems with driver awareness, and believed that many drivers did not notice the change in speed limit during the trial period

- Some operatives misunderstood the intended implementation of the 60mph speed limit, leading to questions about the validity of the trial findings
- Operatives perceived a need for better communication with the public

Similarly, data obtained from the A1 Leeming to Barton (L2B) road worker survey (see Taylor, 2017b) also indicated that operatives in that trial had few safety concerns about a 60mph speed limit following the pilot, and would consider working in such an environment again in future.

However, there were also a number of key differences between the findings of the M1 and M5 focus groups:

- Operatives involved in the M5 J4a-6 trial perceived improvements in driver behaviour and therefore ‘changed their minds’ about the 60mph speed limit after the trial
  - In the M1 J32-35a trial, the initial concerns about safety remained
- Changes to working practices in the M5 trial were made to mitigate the perceived risks associated with the operatives’ own vehicles
  - In the M1 trial, changes were made to mitigate perceived risks associated with expected changes in motorist behaviour
- Operatives involved in the M5 trial perceived the 60mph speed limit to be beneficial (after the trial) and said that they would be comfortable working in or around roadworks with this speed limit in the future
  - In the M1 trial, the 60mph speed limit was perceived to present an unacceptable increase in risk

These findings highlight the importance of considering the factors specific to each scheme when choosing whether or not to implement an increased speed limit. Consultation with the specific stakeholders who may be affected by the change is also very important, since perceptions are likely to differ between schemes depending on experience and circumstance. It is recommended that the findings from this focus group study are considered alongside the other findings from the on-road pilot on the M5 J4a-6 scheme, and the on-road and stakeholder engagement findings from the A1 L2B and M1 J32-35a schemes (see Taylor, 2017a, b; Wallbank, Chowdhury *et al.*, 2017; Wallbank, Hammond *et al.*, 2017; Wallbank, Palmer, *et al.*, 2017). 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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## TRL

Crowthorne House, Nine Mile Ride,  
Wokingham, Berkshire, RG40 3GA,  
United Kingdom  
T: +44 (0) 1344 773131  
F: +44 (0) 1344 770356  
E: [enquiries@trl.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@trl.co.uk)  
W: [www.trl.co.uk](http://www.trl.co.uk)

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