

Chepstow Town Council

Historic Chepstow: *The Way to Wales and the Wye Valley*
See the Chepstow website at www.chepstow.co.uk
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William Powell Assembly Member
Chair - Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

11th January 2016

Dear Mr Powell,

A48 Bridge at Chepstow - Petition for 30mph speed limit
Petition no. P-04-468
Comments on Minister's letter of 15th December 2015

Thank you for the email from your office enclosing the response you received from the Minister for Transport dated 15th December 2015, on the petition for 30mph on the A48 Wye Bridge.

We are still surprised that the Government is unwilling to respond positively on the petition request from pupils of Wydean School, supported by Chepstow Town Council, for a reduction in the speed limit from 50mph to 30mph on this short and dangerous stretch of road.

There seems to be no logical or practical argument against the proposal to reduce speeds to 30mph and in over 2 years we have still not received any explanation of why it is necessary to retain 50mph on this narrow bridge. At 30mph it takes 24 seconds to cross the bridge. At 50mph it takes 14 seconds to cross the bridge. What is so special to the Government about these 10 seconds that it is prepared to insist on a highly dangerous traffic situation for vehicles and for pedestrians? We have never received an explanation of why it needs to be 50mph. The road in question is a high level bridge only 350 yards long. We have never received a detailed response from the Government to any of the reasonable points we have made.

Our specific comments on the Minister's letter of 15th December 2015 are as follows.

1. **Trunk Roads Review.** Paragraph 1 of the Minister's letter refers to the Minister's review of trunk roads. The Trunk Road Review website referred to by the Minister in the letter provides no explanation of the decision. It just says '*Existing Speed Limit to be Retained*'. The Review claims it has been carried out '*in line with the Government guidance on Setting Local Speed Limits in Wales*'. This is not the case for Chepstow. The Government has not followed the guidance. The conditions required by the Guidance for 50mph or 40mph do not exist on the A48 Wye Bridge at Chepstow.

The conditions at Chepstow conform to 30mph in the Guidance. We have written to the Minister in detail on this matter.

2. **Basis for decision.** Paragraph 2 of the letter says that the '*decision to retain existing speed limit was based on a number of factors including personal injury collision records and speed data*'. We would like to know all the factors used as neither of the two quoted factor have any direct bearing on the road conditions on Chepstow Bridge unless the Minister is saying that we need more accidents. We are trying to prevent accidents. The methodology quoted may have some relevance for assessing speed limits on stretches of open road but this is an urban road in a unique situation and it is not appropriate for this bridge. The reference to the data not being in a form which can be shared easily seems unreasonable. If the data were that compelling in the decision to retain the speed limit presumably it was in a form that could be understood by the decision maker. It seems that there is a reluctance to pass on this data. We were invited to participate in a consultation exercise and now we are being told that the outcome is too complex to communicate. It seems that there is some other explanation regarding the speed limit and we are not being advised as to what it is. The most logical and safest place for a change in speed limit is after the bridge has been crossed when leaving Chepstow (and before the bridge is crossed when arriving at Chepstow) - that is where drivers would expect to see a change in speed limit - where the signs are for 'Welcome to England' and 'Welcome to Wales'. To have a change in speed limit 350 yards before these signs makes no sense and is dangerous.
3. **Correspondence and comments taken into account** Paragraph 3 of the letter says that the Council's comments have been taken into account. We do not feel that this has been the case because we have received no reasonable explanation as to why the reasonable points put forward by the petitioners and by the Council are not valid, or not feasible, or not affordable. The decision has remained the same throughout the petition period with no explanation as to 'why'. The Minister has given examples of some of the factors that have taken into account but has not discussed the results, the analysis, and the judgements reached on any of the factors. We still don't know after 2 years. The reference to an official discussing the issue in detail is erroneous. An official did visit Chepstow but made no comments at all about the reasons for the Minister's decision. There was no discussion nor explanation.
4. **Pedestrian Guard Rails.** Paragraph 4 refers to pedestrian guard rails. Pedestrian guard rails have been installed in the last month and this is a welcome move and has improved safety on the bridge. At least we have some protection and it demonstrates that the Petition Committee's persistence has not been in vain. It certainly feels much safer on the pavement on the bridge but there are some hidden dangers. As we predicted, traffic speeds have increased considerably and there is a problem for cyclists which all points to addressing the original issue of reducing the speed limit to 30mph. We have buses and 40 ton HGVs, vans and cars approaching each other at

closing speeds of 100mph with only a couple of feet between the wing mirrors of passing vehicles. There is nowhere to go if an on-coming vehicle is too close to the centre of the road or to swerve or go round a cyclist or anything dropped in the road. A head on impact between vehicles on this bridge would be disastrous and the guard rails would be insufficient to protect pedestrians. The guard rails are welcome but not enough. Crash barriers are needed in the centre of the road and on the west side in front of the guard rail (there is just enough space for crash barriers) and the speed limit must be reduced to 30mph.

5. All these safety measures such as crash barriers and lower speed limits, in addition to guard rails, are in place on the A48 where it crosses the next big river in South Wales, the Usk Bridge at Newport, so why can't they be installed at the Wye Bridge at Chepstow - starting with the 30mph limit. Reducing the speed limit is vital. Barriers help but it is speed that dramatically increases the impact of a collision, and lower speed reduces the impact. This road is a very narrow high level bridge - there is nowhere to go if there is a collision. It needs a 30mph speed limit.

Once again many thanks for your continued help. The guard rails are a step in the right direction but the petition was for a 30mph speed limit and that is still needed to make the bridge safer both for vehicles and pedestrians.

Yours sincerely,


Caroline Tremeer

Town Clerk



Dale Rooke

Town Mayor

