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13 April 2011

Dear XXXX,

### Freedom of Information Request – ‘A’ Road Reference Speeds

I am writing to confirm that the Department has now completed its search for the information which you requested on 21 March 2011. You referred to the Department's inter-urban congestion statistics for January 2011 and asked:

***“On what basis has the decision been made to set a lower speed expectation for dual carriageway ‘A’ roads compared with single carriageway ‘A’ roads”***

The data to which you refer are the reference speeds that the Department currently uses to calculate delays to journeys made on the Strategic Road Network (SRN). These are repeated for information below:

Speed Limit (mph)	Reference Speed (mph)		
	Trunk ‘A’ road, single carriageway	Trunk ‘A’ road, dual carriageway	Motorway
30	22	25	-
40	32	30	-
50	40	37	50
60	45	57	60
70	-	62	67

These references were derived from the Department's series of national speed surveys (1995-2007) and relate to the average speed achieved during off-peak periods when roads of these types were surveyed. These surveys were carried out every two to three years over this period and involved probe vehicles being driven along each section of the SRN with the driver attempting to maintain a speed representative of that of the general traffic flow.

The reference figures were therefore drawn from empirical survey data and are intended to provide a benchmark from which observed speeds on different types of roads can be compared against. They do not, however, represent the speeds that should be expected on these roads, especially at peak times.

As shown in the above table, almost all references are lower than the speed limit, reflecting the need for traffic to slow down at junctions and that, even in the best conditions, the speed limit will not on average be attained. In addition, as you suggest, the figures for 40 and 50 mph roads appear to be slightly counter-intuitive in that the reference speeds are slightly faster for single carriageway ‘A’ roads than for dual carriageways.

It is difficult to provide a detailed explanation for this without studying every individual section of the network that falls into these categories. However, as all reference speeds were calculated from empirical survey data, it is likely that the difference in references for single and dual carriageways with these speed limits simply reflects the specific characteristics of these types of road on the SRN. Factors that could affect the derived reference speeds on each road include: traffic density during off-peak periods; road surface conditions; the presence of traffic calming measures such as speed cameras and the exact layout of the road and location of junctions such as roundabouts.

In addition, it should be noted that the reference speeds outlined above are only used as a comparator for roads of the same type and with the same speed limits in place. As such, the reference speed for 30 mph single carriageway 'A' roads, for example, will only be used to estimate the level of delay on roads of this exact type, thereby comparing data as far as possible on a like-for-like basis.

On a final point, it should also be noted that the Department's speed surveys have now been discontinued and all the data used to calculate traffic speeds on the SRN are derived from the Highways Agency's Traffic and Information System (HATRIS). This database contains journey time data from a variety of sources including Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras, in-vehicle Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and Motorway Incident Detection Automatic Signalling (MIDAS) inductive loops. HATRIS also contains traffic flow data from automatic count points.

In keeping with the spirit and effect of the Freedom of Information Act, all information is assumed to be releasable to the public unless exempt. A copy of the response may now be published on our website together with any related information that will provide a key to its wider context.

If you are unhappy with the way the Department has handled your request or with the decisions made in relation to your request you may complain within two calendar months of the date of this letter by writing to the Department's Information Rights Unit at:

Zone D/04  
Ashdown House  
Sedlescombe Road North  
Hastings  
East Sussex TN37 7GA  
E-mail: [FOI-Advice-Team-DFT@dft.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:FOI-Advice-Team-DFT@dft.gsi.gov.uk)

Please see attached details of DfT's complaints procedure and your right to complain to the Information Commissioner.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact me using the details given above.

Yours sincerely,

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## **Your right to complain to DfT and the Information Commissioner**

You have the right to complain within two calendar months of the date of this letter about the way in which your request for information was handled and/or about the decision not to disclose all or part of the information requested. In addition a complaint can be made that DfT has not complied with its FOI publication scheme.

Your complaint will be acknowledged and you will be advised of a target date by which to expect a response. Initially your complaint will be re-considered by the official who dealt with your request for information. If, after careful consideration, that official decides that his/her decision was correct, your complaint will automatically be referred to a senior independent official who will conduct a further review. You will be advised of the outcome of your complaint and if a decision is taken to disclose information originally withheld this will be done as soon as possible.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office  
Wycliffe House  
Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
Cheshire  
SK9 5AF