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Cross-country policy comparison of 30 km/h speed limits

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1 Introduction

Lowering of speed limits to 30 kilometres per hour (20 miles per hour) has increasingly become recognised as a potential way to both reduce the incidence and severity of road trauma (World Health Organization, 2017), and increase the ability of populations to utilise active modes of transport, such as walking and bike riding, for local trips (Pearson et al., 2024). A number of areas including Wales and London in the United Kingdom, and British Columbia in Canada, are more advanced in implementation, however global uptake is slow (Trafnidiaeth Cymru (Transport for Wales), 2024). In the state of Victoria, Australia, only two 30 km/h speed zones have been implemented, and only on a trial basis. These zones have not been widely adopted across Australia, and to date, we have little understanding of what policy and practice barriers limit their implementation, and how these could be overcome. Greater understanding of the barriers to implementation is needed to rapidly advance implementation of this effective road safety intervention. In this study, we aimed to identify and explore barriers and enablers of implementation of 30 km/h speed limits in the state of Victoria, Australia, and compare this to implementation in an area where 30 km/h speed zones have been implemented successfully – British Columbia, Canada.

2 Methods

We conducted semi-structured interviews with relevant policy and implementation partners across government departments and local councils in Victoria, Australia and British Columbia, Canada, to identify and explore barriers to and enablers of successful implementation of 30 km/h speed limits. Data were analysed abductively through reflexive thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2023).

3 Results

Semi structured interviews were conducted with 26 people across Victoria, Australia (*n*=14) and British Columbia, Canada (*n*=12) between February 2023 and January 2024. Six key themes were identified: (i) Appetite for change, describing recognition of importance of 30 km/h speed limits throughout state and local governments; (ii) Policy misalignment, describing a discrepancy between recognition of the importance of 30 km/h speed limits, and limitations in policy to implement them; (iii) Lack of local evidence, describing how a lack of local evidence of what road environments are suitable for 30 km/h speeds limits; (iv) Council capacity, describing the stretched capacity of local government, where responsibility of delivery of 30 km/h speed limits lie; (v) Need for 'self-explaining' roads, describing a need for a whole of road environment approach for targeting 30 km/h speeds, rather than signage changes only, and (vi) Equity lessons in implementation, which detailed the unintended effects learned through implementation.

4 Discussion

This qualitative study compared the barriers to implementation of 30 km/h speed limits in Victoria, Australia, to successfully scaled implementation across British Columbia, Canada. We demonstrated that the current policy (Victorian Department of Transport and Planning,

2021), which only enables 30 km/h speed limits to exist on a trial basis, is misaligned with the widespread recognition across state and local government of the need for rapid roll out of 30 km/h speed limits to improve road safety - particularly for people walking, riding or rolling. We identified that a contributing reason for why this policy has not changed is due to limited local, context-specific and whole-of-system evidence for where 30 km/h speed limits should be implemented, and limited local case studies (there are only two 30 km/h speed zones in Victoria). Contributing to limited local case studies and in turn, context-specific evidence, is the complex and lengthy process of application, approval and trialling, which comes at the cost of resource constrained local governments. In contrast, British Columbia have successfully implemented 41 30 km/h speed zones, where local municipalities are able to implement the intervention without approval at a Provincial level.

Victorian state government policy reform is needed to enable easier implementation by local governments, and updated guidance is required to understand which road environments are most suitable for 30 km/h speed zones.

5 References

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