



Ein cyf/Our ref ATISN 11157

12 April, 2017

Dear

**Request for Information – ATISN 11157**

We wrote to you on 14 March regarding your request for information. You asked for information regarding variable speed limits in relation to junction 26 of the M4. Please accept my apologies for the delay in providing you with this response.

I confirm we hold some information relating to your request. My response is outlined below.

| Enquiry No. | WG Response                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
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| 1.          | <p>Throughout the M4 variable speed limit scheme (junctions 24 to 28) the mandatory speed limit is adjusted according to traffic conditions to keep vehicles moving at a steady rate. Normally during periods of no congestion on an incident-free carriageway, no variable speed limit signs or signals are set and the national speed limit applies. At busy times or in the event of an incident, sensors will detect congestion beginning to build up. The system automatically calculates the optimum speed limit for the current amount of traffic and this is automatically displayed on the electronic signals above lanes or at the side of the road.</p> <p>Alongside this automated speed limit operation, authorised control centre operators will manually set speed limits in the event of an incident on the carriageway (including adverse weather conditions) or in support of road works. When a manual speed limit has been set, it can still be overridden to a lower speed limit by the automatic operation of the system, where congestion is detected (e.g. a manual 50mph can be overridden by a 40mph automatic setting).</p> <p>On 1<sup>st</sup> December 2016, 50mph speed limits were manually set by authorised control centre operators due to adverse weather conditions across the M4.</p> <p>At Junction 26 eastbound gantry, the mandatory speed limit was initially</p> |



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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding .

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
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|    | manually set at 14:53 due to adverse weather. In accordance with the normal operation of the variable speed limit system, the 50mph setting was then automatically overridden to a lower speed limit of 40mph periodically between 16:00 and 17:54, in response to congestion conditions. The 40mph automatic speed limit ended at 18:00, when the mandatory speed limit reverted to the manual setting of 50mph, due to continuing adverse weather conditions. The 50mph setting remained in force from 18:00 until 21:49 when signals were manually changed to support road works.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 2. | As above                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 3. | <p>On 11<sup>th</sup> January 2017, in accordance with normal practice, the speed limit signals were manually set in support of road works, for the protection of the work force and approaching traffic. During the setting out of traffic management, signals at the Junction 26 eastbound gantry in question were manually set to 50mph at 19:59. A speed limit of 40mph was then set automatically at 20:09 – this automatic setting is likely to have been triggered by slow-moving vehicles associated with the setting out of traffic management.</p> <p>When a mandatory speed limit changes on the overhead signal, there is an automatic delay before enforcement can begin against the newly displayed limit. In this situation, drivers are not expected to brake sharply, but rather to reduce their speed so that they are within the speed limit as soon as it is safe to do so.</p>                                        |
| 4. | <p>The step down and variations in the speed limit between junction 28 and junction 26 are being provided to help filter traffic off the motorway as part of the closure of the eastbound Brynglas Tunnel bore overnight. The signals provide a gradual reduction in speed on the approach to the affected location where lanes have been closed.</p> <p>At junction 26 the left-hand lane of the motorway becomes an off-slip. The two motorway running lanes are closed with the use of red X signals to support the traffic management closure. The use of red X signals, in combination with the geometry at this junction, gives rise to a more restrictive setting in the signal sequencing rules, causing a 20mph to be displayed.</p> <p>Although the main works appear to be some distance away, there is always the possibility of road works operatives being on the carriageway to set out or maintain traffic management.</p> |
| 5. | See Point 4 above.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 6. | The settings described in Point 4 above will apply for the duration of an instance of road works at the location.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 7. | <p>The dates specified of Wednesday 11/01/17, Monday 16/01/17, Thursday 19/01/17, Monday 23/01/17, Wednesday 25/01/17, Wednesday 01/02/17, Thursday 02/02/17 and Tuesday 07/02/17 all occurred during the Monday to Thursday 20:00-06:00 road works closures applied as part of the Brynglas Tunnel refurbishment works. Future planned closure dates are available at the following link:<br/> <a href="http://www.traffic-wales.com/VoyagerNews.aspx?NEWSID=126">http://www.traffic-wales.com/VoyagerNews.aspx?NEWSID=126</a></p> <p>On the evening specified date of Friday 03/02/17, there was no gradual</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

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|     | reduction of speed limits in this manner, as there were no road works in place.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 8.  | See Point 7 above.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 9.  | Not applicable.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 10. | The National Speed Limit signs shown in the M4 Variable Speed Limit section are a non-prescribed variant of TSRGD Diagram No. 671. The signs have been authorised by the Welsh Government under Sections 64 and 65 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 11. | Automatic signals are set by the traffic management system. Authorised control centre operators intervene in the event of an incident or during roadworks, as described above, in accordance with the control room operational procedures for incident management. All operators have been authorised by Welsh Government to set signs and signals on the Welsh Government road network.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 12. | As above.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 13. | <p>The Variable Speed Limits are set automatically using the sensors in the road as described under Point 1.</p> <p>Authorised control centre operators intervene in the event of an incident or during roadworks, as described above.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 14. | As above                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 15. | The Traffic Management Centre is staffed by the control centre operators 24 hours a day, 7 days a week without exception.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 16. | The reasons for which temporary speed limits are set have been described above.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 17. | <p>The reasons for which temporary speed limits are set have been described above.</p> <p>In accordance with the Highway Code:</p> <p>On the motorway - Rule 261<br/>         "You MUST NOT exceed 70 mph (112 km/h), or the maximum speed limit permitted for your vehicle (see Speed limits table). If a lower speed limit is in force, either permanently or temporarily, at road works for example, you MUST NOT exceed the lower limit. On some motorways, mandatory motorway signals (which display the speed within a red ring) are used to vary the maximum speed limit to improve traffic flow. You MUST NOT exceed this speed limit."</p> |
| 18. | Policies and procedures are subject to continual review.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 19. | Yes within this FOI.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 20. | Offences are recorded directly by the police or GoSafe. Numerous contractors and subcontractors operating for highways maintenance bodies will have "highways maintenance" liveried vehicles. We are not able to establish where the highway maintenance vehicles were seen to be committing offences, nor whether or not they were linked to operations being carried out on behalf of the Welsh Government.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 21. | Offences are recorded directly by the police or GoSafe. Any vehicle committing an offence within the Variable Speed Limit that is recorded by the enforcement cameras will be subject to prosecution.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

If you are dissatisfied with the Welsh Government's handling of your request, you can ask for an internal review within 40 working days of the date of this response. Requests for an internal review should be addressed to the Welsh Government's Freedom of Information Officer at:

Information Rights Unit, Welsh Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NQ or [FreedomOfInformationOfficer@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:FreedomOfInformationOfficer@wales.gsi.gov.uk). Please remember to quote the ATISN reference number above.

You also have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF.

However, please note that the Commissioner will not normally investigate a complaint until it has been through our own internal review process.

Yours sincerely

**Operations and Maintenance Manager**