

The government of Brussels Region will soon decide whether to raise the speed limit from 50 to 70 km/h in some tunnel sections of the inner ring road. Representatives of two advocacy associations argue the case for and against

## FOR

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For decades, motorists have been subjected to a 50 km/h speed limit in the tunnels and inner ring of Brussels. Outside rush hour, over 90% of drivers exceed this limit, especially in the long tunnels without intersections. In the Leopold II tunnel, for example, cars travel mostly at 70-90 km/h. This situation has not led to an unusual rate of accidents.

Ending the frustrating 50 km/h rule would be common sense. A modern approach would permit speeds of 80 km/h in normal circumstances (with zero tolerance for offenders) but to temporarily activate "50" signs in case of heavy traffic or for other reasons.

The enemies of the car – members of small but dynamic associations – are a tiny minority who aspire to a car-free city that is purer but poor. The political party which supports them is small but vocal in local and regional government. It is very creative in finding ways to discourage private-car use: reducing the number of lanes on certain roads, for example, and making two-way streets into one-way streets, which increase travel time and mileage (and hence CO<sub>2</sub> emissions!). They have also cut the number of parking spaces and decreased speed limits, allegedly for safety reasons, even in the absence of casualty figures to justify this.

Today, the government has to choose between an aesthetic-ideological approach to our future mobility and socio-economic development (of course, with full respect for environmental criteria). The latter would facilitate business activity, and hence employment.

To ensure that the second option is pursued and to promote economic activity, Brussels must offer fast, safe and comfortable point-to-point travel. This is mainly possible through two means: firstly, by maintaining car traffic at a reasonable level (presently, 56% of journeys within Brussels are made by car) and at a reasonable speed; and secondly, by extending the metro network (whose trains travel at an average of 30 km/h, compared to trams' 17 km/h). Let us hope that when making the decision about speed limits in Brussels' tunnels, our government will respect democracy and listen less to the noisy lobbying of anti-car groups and more to the large majority of residents and owners of cars, which, by the way, are getting cleaner and cleaner.



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## AGAINST

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**European Transport Safety Council (ETSC)**

Brussels Region should not raise the speed limit in tunnel sections of the inner ring road from 50 to 70 km/h.

Speed kills; it is the single most important cause of traffic death and injury across Europe. Brussels is the capital of Europe and should do its bit to fulfil the European commitment to reduce by half the yearly number of road deaths by 2010. Raising speed limits here would not only send the wrong signal to Brussels citizens but do little to save lives on our overloaded urban network. Research shows that a 5 percent increase in average speed leads to a 20 percent increase in deaths.

A change in speed limits would have an impact beyond the tunnels themselves, on adjacent roads and intersections with crossings with pedestrians and cyclists. This so called 'speed blindness' is the phenomenon where cars coming off a 70 km/h road would slow down less than if they were to leaving a 50 km/h road. Few of the tunnels have emergency lanes and bays, which means that in case of breakdowns a whole lane is blocked. A higher speed limit would create an even more dangerous situation during the time it takes to clear the blocked lane.

Instead of raising limits, what is needed is stricter enforcement of the current 50 km/h speed limit. Fixed safety cameras that measure average speed would also prevent the 'slow down-speed up' effect of single point safety cameras. A higher profile mobile police presence should be conspicuous and linked to media campaigns about the risks of speeding. This should make it clear it is not about catching people out or raising revenue but about getting them to stop putting their own and others' lives at risk. Seventy percent

of European drivers are (strongly) in favour of more enforcement of traffic laws, according to an EU survey.

Brussels Capital should encourage smoother, constant speeds with limited acceleration and deceleration: 'eco-driving' which is good for safety, for drivers' pockets and for both air quality and noise levels.

Inspiration should come from Paris, which is reducing speed limits on urban roads, from 70 km/h to 50 km/h along the banks of the river Seine.

For the sake of safety, quality of life and for our carbon footprint there is no sense in raising this speed limit.