

Establishing Realistic Speed Limits in California



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Fundamentals of Speed Zoning

- Driving behavior is an extension of social attitude. The majority of drivers operate their vehicles in a safe and reasonable manner as demonstrated by their consistently favorable driving records.
- The normally careful and competent actions of a reasonable person should be considered legal, especially when it has not resulted in endangerment of safety of other persons or property.
- Laws cannot be effectively enforced without consent and voluntary compliance of public majority.

The Myths of the Speed Limits

- **Speed limit signs will slow the speed of traffic.**
- **Speed limit signs will decrease the accident rate and increase safety (even where there are no such documented problems).**
- **Raising a posted speed limit will cause an increase in the speed of traffic.**
- **Any posted speed limit must be safer than an unspotted speed limit, regardless of the type of the roadway or conditions present.**

The Reality of the Speed Limits

Numerous before-and-after studies and research throughout the country have consistently demonstrated that there are no significant changes in traffic speeds following posting of new or revised speed limits.

California Law

Prima Facie v. Established

- **Basic Speed Law**
- ***“No person shall drive a vehicle upon a highway at a speed greater than is reasonable or prudent having due regard for weather, visibility, the traffic on, and the surface and width of, the highway, and in no event at a speed which endangers the safety of persons or property.” (CVC Section 22350)***

Speed Trap Law (CVC Section 40802)



Background

The Policy on Speed Limit before 2004 (Traffic Manual)

The speed limit normally should be established at the **first five mile per hour increment below the 85th percentile speed**. However, in matching existing conditions with the traffic safety needs of the community, engineering judgment may indicate the need of **further reduction of five miles per hour, as authorized and regulated by the California Vehicle Code** (CVC Section 22358.5).

Current CA MUTCD Policy on Speed Limit (after 2004):

- Guidance:

When a speed limit is to be posted, it should be established at the **nearest 10 km/h (5 mph) increment of the 85th-percentile speed** of free-flowing traffic.

- Option:

The posted speed **may be reduced by 10 km/h (5 mph)** from the nearest 10 km/h or 5 mph increment of the 85th-percentile speed, where engineering study indicates the need for reduction in speed to match existing conditions with the traffic safety needs of the community.

Follow Up Actions by the CTCDC

- **June 7, 2007 Meeting**
- **October 10 Workshop and October 11, 2007 Meeting**
- **January 31, 2008 Meeting**
- **September 17 & 18, 2008 Meeting**
- **March 19, 2009 – Special Meeting**
- **May 14, 2009 Meeting**
- **Final Policy Directive to be issued by July 1, 2009**

What the Policy Directive will say

Section 2B.13 Speed Limit Sign (R2-1)

CA MUTCD

Keeping the existing regulations in the CA MUTCD with added emphasis on the required documentation for applying the additional 5 mph reduction currently allowed. Additional 5 mph reduction must be justified by a registered civil or traffic engineer in the Engineering and Traffic Survey (E&TS).

Caltrans in collaboration with the CTCDC will develop a new training and educational program.



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