

Speed Limits



Traffic Engineering
Department

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Pleasanton, CA 94566

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Misconceptions:

Citizens frequently ask why we don't install lower speed limit signs to control speed.

Speed limits in non-residential areas of town are established based on the speed of the vehicles on the roadway. Most drivers drive at a speed that they consider comfortable, regardless of the posted speed limit.

"Before and after" studies have shown that there are no significant changes in average vehicle speeds following the posting of new or revised speed limits. Furthermore, research has found no direct relationship between **posted** speed limits and collision frequency.

Speed Laws:

All fifty states base their speed regulations on the Basic speed Law: The California Vehicle Code states "No person shall drive a vehicle ... at a speed greater than is reasonable or prudent ... and in no event at a speed which endangers the safety of persons or property."

Under California law, the maximum speed limit in urban areas is 65 mph. Certain speed limits are established by State law and include the 25 MPH speed limit in business and residential districts and 25 MPH in school zones when children are present. These speed limits do not need to be posted in order to be enforced.



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Engineering/Traffic Surveys:

Speed limits between 25 and 65 MPH are established on the basis of engineering and traffic surveys.

Engineering and traffic surveys include an analysis of roadway conditions, collision records and a sampling of the prevailing speed of traffic. A safe and reasonable limit is set at the 5 mile per hour increment closest to the 85th percentile speed of motorists.

A 5 mile per hour speed limit reduction is allowed at locations with unusual conditions not readily apparent to the driver.

The Purpose of Speed Limits:

Speed limits provide notice to drivers of the maximum speed limit on a roadway and are an enforcement tool to assist police in separating violators from the reasonable majority.

If posted speed limits are set artificially low, disrespect is created for the limits, and since they are not set in accordance with the law, they are not enforceable with radar. The state maximum speed limit would then apply. The occasional driver attempting to obey the posted speed limit may decrease safety by causing additional lane changes, passing and tailgating.

Setting speed limits near the prevailing speed of traffic results in traffic flowing at uniform speeds. Correctly set speed limits can increase safety and lead to fewer accidents.

Speed Advisory Signs:

Some people confuse “Speed Limit” signs and “Speed Advisory” signs. Regulatory speed limit signs are posted in black letters on a white background and are enforceable. Speed advisory signs are written in black on a yellow background. Speed advisory signs warn drivers of unusual localized conditions and are not enforceable. Speed advisory signs are typically found in advance of a curve.

The advisory speed is NOT the safe speed for every vehicle, driver and pavement condition. The advisory sign is just an indication that alerts drivers to the need and relative extent to which they should slow down.



If you need further information please call the Traffic Engineering Department at:

925-931-5650