

Setting speed limits on local roads

Across the country, speeding is a major concern—with good reason. Seventy percent of drivers exceed posted speed limits, most by 10 mph or more, according to one study. And, as speeds go up, crash severity and injury risk increase—by 5% for each one mph, another study suggests.

Setting speed limits can be a challenge for local officials. They must balance a variety of competing, and often vocal, concerns from drivers, residents, fire departments, law enforcement agencies, and traffic engineers. To be legal and enforceable, speed limits must be properly set following state statutes and adopted by local ordinance. A new fact sheet from the T.I.C. will help.



Setting Speed Limits on Local Roads, No. 21, explains the philosophy, summarizes statutory limits, and describes the process for changing limits. It also discusses signs, enforcement, advisory speeds, and other speed issues.

The state has set speed limits for all roads. However, municipalities can change them under authority and guidelines in the *Wisconsin Statutes*. For example, the statutory limit is

25 mph on residential streets within a village or city. Local authorities responsible for the roadway can raise or lower that limit by as much as 10 mph.

Common sense says that regulating speed is a good way to make streets and highways safer. As a result, citizens may demand lower speeds, especially after a severe crash or pedestrian injury.

Driving behavior is difficult to manage, however. Most drivers choose a speed that feels safe and comfortable to them with little attention to posted limits. Many other things influence what speed they choose:

- road geometry
- land use
- traffic volume and prevailing speed
- weather and road conditions
- presence of pedestrians, bicyclists and parked cars
- their own attitudes, habits and capabilities
- their vehicle's type and characteristics
- enforcement and public attitudes

Before setting limits on a road section, you must do engineering and traffic speed studies, according to the statutes. You may find county Traffic Safety Commissions and district WisDOT engineering staff helpful. It is particularly important to coordinate limit setting and enforcement with your local law enforcement agency.

In general, speeds should be consistent, safe, reasonable and enforceable so as to encourage voluntary compliance. When limits are unreasonably low drivers disregard them and learn disrespect for all limits. At the same time low limits may give pedestrians and residents a false sense of security. On the other hand, unreasonably high limits create unnecessary risks.

When limits are set so that 85% of drivers voluntarily comply, it is then possible and reasonable to enforce them with the 15% who drive too fast.

*Single copies of **Setting Speed Limits on Local Roads, No. 21**, are available from the T.I.C. Call, e-mail, fax, or write us for yours. Please use the form on page 7.*

Resources

Materials are available from the Wisconsin T.I.C. unless otherwise noted. For a copy call 800/442-4615 or use the form on pg. 7.

Using Recovered Materials in Highway Construction (No. 20), T.I.C. factsheet, 8 pp. **New in 1999**, this pamphlet introduces the benefits, sources, applications, and environmental considerations of using reclaimed materials in highway construction. Glass, fly ash, bottom ash, boiler slag, foundry sand, and steel slag are all discussed.

Setting Speed Limits on Local Roads (No. 21), T.I.C. factsheet, 6 pp. **New in 1999**, this pamphlet gives background information, summarizes statutory limits, and describes the process for changing speed limits. It also discusses signs, enforcement, advisory speeds, and other speed issues.

Five Traffic Information Program Tips from Florida, Florida Section of ITE, 1998. Here are one-page answers to five tough traffic questions often asked by neighborhood groups:

1. Won't a STOP sign slow traffic on our street?
2. Why are those STOP signs so high?
3. Why can't we have a 4-way STOP sign?
4. Won't a traffic signal reduce accidents at our intersection?
5. How much traffic will that new development generate?

New videotapes in the T.I.C. library

Tapes are loaned free through Wisconsin County Extension Offices. If you need a video catalogue, call 800/442-4615.

Stormwater Best Management Practices at Quarry Sites #18182, Wisconsin Aggregate Producers, Wisconsin Asphalt Pavement Association, Wisconsin Road Builders, and Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources, 5 min. Covers measures recommended to protect water quality at a quarry site. Includes stormwater, aggregate wash water, etc. Useful for quarry operators, owners, and the public.

Modern Aggregate and Hot Mix Asphalt, Production Quarry Version #18183, Wisconsin Asphalt Pavement Association, 8 min. Reviews steps in hot mix asphalt production and paving. Includes quarry blasting, aggregate production, control house, drum mixer, bag house, storage silo, and paving. Good overview for the public and elected officials.

"So You Have to Run a Stack Test," Air Emissions Testing #18184, Wisconsin Aggregate Producers, Wisconsin Asphalt Pavement Association, Wisconsin Road Builders, and Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources, 5 min. Overview of air quality testing procedures. Covers aggregate and hot mix asphalt plants. Helpful for plant owners, elected officials and the public.

Modern Aggregate and Hot Mix Asphalt, Production Gravel Version #18185, Wisconsin Asphalt Pavement Association, 9 min. Same as "Quarry Version" (above).