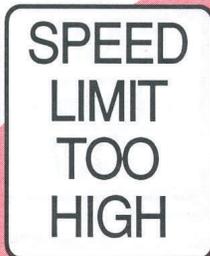


Reducing speed limits to an unrealistically low value does not increase safety, but may create a “speed-trap”. A “speed-trap” is a road segment where normal conditions are adequate for a higher speed than the official speed limit selected and where the enforcement activity is high.

A speed limit that is “too high” will be ignored by the reasonable majority, but a few will drive too fast and create speed differentials.

If conditions are adequate, high speed is not a significant cause of accidents. However, speed differentials are a significant cause of accidents. At higher speeds, stopping distance increases and accidents that do occur tend to cause more damage to persons and property.



## REALISTIC SPEED LIMITS

An appropriate, “just right” speed limit will result in the maximum number of vehicles traveling at about the same speed, thus reducing conflicts caused by speed differentials. The 85th percentile speed, that speed at or below which 85% of the traffic is moving, is widely accepted as being closest to that “just right” speed limit – a case of Majority Rule. Of course, other traffic investigation factors must be taken into consideration.

Following are some reasons for establishing realistic speed limits:

- A) To provide guidance to the driver, especially strangers to the area, as to what is a suitable speed for normal conditions;
- B) Reasonable speed limits with adequate signing tend to reduce the speed difference between vehicles. The accident rate is less when the majority of vehicles are traveling at about the same speed;
- C) To furnish enforcement personnel with a guide as to what is an appropriate speed for a segment of road so that enforcement actions may be consistent and fair;
- D) To improve the overall credibility of all traffic control devices.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

Anyone may report a road segment where the speed limit seems to be too high or too low. If the segment is a portion of city street, contact should be with that municipality. If the segment is a portion of the State Highway System, including U.S. and interstate routes, contact should be with the Region’s Traffic and Safety Engineer of the Colorado Department of Transportation. If the segment is a portion of Weld County’s road system, contact should be made with the Weld County Public Works Department at: (970) 304-6496 Ext. 3726

Questions or issues regarding enforcement should be directed to Weld County Sheriff’s Office at:  
(970) 356-1212



# Establishing Realistic SPEED LIMITS



# Why Speed Limits?

## LAW

Prima facie limits are those which, “on the face of it”, are reasonable and prudent under normal conditions. A driver may exceed any prima facie limit if it is safe to do so; however, it is up to the driver to prove that he was driving in a safe manner under existing conditions.

In Colorado, basic prima facie speed limits are:

- 25 mph in any business district
- 30 mph in any residential district

Absolute speed limits are those which may not be legally exceeded under any circumstances:

- 55 mph on open highways which are not on the interstate system, and are not surfaced, four-lane freeways or expressways
- 65 mph surfaced, four-lane highways which are on the interstate system, or are freeways or expressways
- 75 mph on rural interstate routes
- Any speed not in excess of a speed limit designated by an official traffic control device

On Weld County roads, the speed limit is 55 mph except where posted otherwise or within business districts, residential areas, or in areas where special conditions require a lower speed.

Section 42-4-1102, Colorado Revised Statutes, requires that speed limits are not to be higher or lower than the basic prima facie speed limits unless a traffic investigation has justified the change. This law applies to all State Highways, County Roads and City Streets. For Weld County, excluding portions within municipal corporate limits, the investigation to justify an increase or decrease of existing speed limits is conducted by the Weld County Public Works Department.

Each investigation to determine an appropriate speed limit should consider the following factors applicable to the portion of road being studied.

- Vehicle speed data (85th percentile)
- Roadside development
- Accident experience
- Road characteristics
- Hazardous locations (curves)
- Parking practices/pedestrian activity

The use of vehicle speed data as one of the factors evaluated for selecting a suitable speed limit is based upon the following fundamental concepts deeply rooted in the United States system of government and law:

- A) Laws cannot be effectively enforced without the consent and voluntary compliance of the public;
- B) Laws are established for the protection of the public and the regulation of the unreasonable behavior of a few individuals;
- C) The normally careful and competent actions of a reasonable person should be considered legal;
- D) Most drivers are reasonable people who will drive carefully at a speed which is suitable for the existing conditions.

## MISCONCEPTIONS

It is a popular misconception that reducing the speed limit will automatically slow speed of traffic, while raising the speed limit will automatically cause an increase in the speed of traffic.

Most “Before and After” speed studies show that there are no significant changes in vehicle speeds

after speed limits are changed. “Before and After” accident studies usually do not show significant change in accident rates after speed limits are increased or decreased.

## UNREALISTIC SPEED LIMITS

Traffic investigations have shown that most people will drive the roadway as they perceive the conditions and will ignore a speed limit that is unrealistically too low or too high. A realistic speed limit is voluntarily obeyed by the reasonable majority and more enforcement effort can be applied to the unreasonable few who drive too fast or too slow.



An unrealistic speed limit that is “too low” will:

- A) Make the behavior of the majority unlawful;
- B) If enforced – cause antagonism toward enforcement personnel and traffic laws in general;
- C) Create a bad image of the community for visitors and tourists;
- D) Result in speed differentials in the traffic flow.