

# Speed Limits

Speed limits are intended to provide motorists, enforcement officials and traffic courts with information on reasonable and safe speeds that will facilitate the safe, orderly flow of traffic under normal conditions. The public should be encouraged to bring to the attention of public officials what they perceive to be speeding problems, but speed limits should not be set based on casual observations or uninformed opinion. Public agencies have responsibility to establish speed limits based upon thorough traffic engineering surveys.

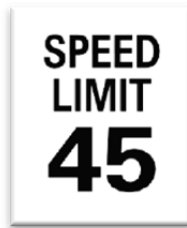


Under the Michigan Vehicle Code, the basic Speed Law states *"a person driving a vehicle on a highway shall drive at a careful and prudent speed not greater than nor less than is reasonable and proper."*

The maximum speed limit on all highways is 55 miles per hour (mph). On roads where there is no posted speed limit, or on gravel/unpaved roads, the speed limit is known as the "prima facie" speed limit. Prima facie speed limits are subject to driver judgment of driving conditions. The prima facie speed limit in residential and business districts is 25 mph. These speeds may not always be posted, but motorists are required to know them.

## 85TH PERCENTILE SPEED

Speed limits between 25 and 55 mph are established by a joint administrative action between the Macomb County Department of Roads (MCDR) and the Michigan State Police (MSP) via a traffic engineering study.



A traffic engineering study analyzes the road conditions, crash history and prevailing speeds along the road. The speed limit is then set at the speed at or below which 85 percent of the drivers drive, otherwise known as the 85th percentile speed. Studies have shown that posting the speed limit at the 85th percentile speed results in more uniform traffic flow and fewer accidents. Drivers tend to be less impatient, pass less often and tailgate less, thereby reducing traffic crashes. In addition, posting an appropriate speed limit simplifies law enforcement and makes enforcement more effective since blatant speeders are easily identified and Officers are not trying to enforce unrealistic and arbitrary speed limits.

## GRAVEL ROADS

Due to the changing conditions of these roads, MCDR does not post speed limits on gravel roads. Roads that do not have posted speed limits fall under Michigan's Basic Speed Law which requires a driver to drive in a safe and reasonable manner with a maximum speed of 55 mph.

## SCHOOL ZONES

School speed zones are generally established for the protection of students (8<sup>th</sup> grade and below) walking to and from school. According to state law, the speed limit in a school zone is 25 mph. However, the speed can be set at no more than 15 mph below the regularly posted speed limit, but not less than 25 mph, if there is a sidewalk on at least one side of the road.

The need for such zones is determined from a study involving MCDR, MSP and the appropriate school district. MCDR will consider requests for school speed zone studies only from the school district's Superintendent.



The school speed limit can only be in force:

- Between 30 minutes and an hour before the first regularly scheduled school session until school starts;
- During the lunch period if students are allowed to leave the school; and
- Between 30 minutes and an hour after school is dismissed.

Permanent signs designating the school zone and speed limit will be posted.

## A LOWER SPEED LIMIT IS ALWAYS SAFER, RIGHT?



The MCDR receives many requests to post a lower speed in order to 'slow down traffic' on a road and 'make it safer.' However, lower speed limits do not necessarily improve safety or reduce speeds. The more uniform the speeds of vehicles in a traffic stream, the less chance there is for conflict and crashes. Posting speed limits lower or higher than what the majority of drivers are traveling produces two distinct groups of drivers – those attempting to observe the limit and those driving at what they feel is reasonable and prudent. These differences in speeds may result in increased crashes due to tailgating, improper passing, reckless driving and weaving from lane to lane.

Inappropriate speed limits also foster disregard for other speed limits, traffic signs and signals, and contribute to driver frustration. Finally, when traffic is traveling at different speeds, the number of gaps in traffic to allow safe crossing is reduced and pedestrians and other drivers have a more difficult time in judging the speed of approaching vehicles.

National Research and experience in Macomb County confirm that appropriate speed limits do not increase traffic crashes. Contrary to the notion that “increasing the speed limit will increase speed of traffic by another 5 to 10 miles per hour,” national and local experience shows that there is no substantial increase in speeds after a higher speed limit is posted appropriately.

Speed limits were evaluated on Mound Road between M-59 and 26 Mile Road and changed to the appropriate speed limits in 2007. The speed limit was modified from 45 mph to 50 mph. A study of speeds and crashes was performed and the following are some results:

85<sup>th</sup> Percentile Speeds before and after:

Mound Road	BEFORE		AFTER		
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2011
23 Mile to 24 Mile Road	49.5	49	49.5	49.5	51
24 Mile to 25 Mile Road	48.5	49.5	49	49.5	49.5
25 Mile to 26 Mile Road	49	52	51.5	51.5	52.8

No significant change in speeds observed.

A comparison of traffic crashes 3 years before the speed limit change (2004-2007) and 3 years after the speed limit change to 50 mph was also performed. Results of this study on Mound Road showed that traffic crashes decreased by 12 percent.

### FREEWAYS



Freeway speed limits are set by State law and can only be changed by the state legislature. State law dictates that the maximum speed on Michigan freeways is 70 mph. In many places, though, the maximum speed limit is 65 mph, and typically in congested urban areas, the maximum speed limit is 55 mph.



*The Macomb County Department of Roads takes its role in responding to traffic concerns very seriously, yet the ultimate burden of safety rests on you, the motorist in the County. We will respond to every traffic concern you have. Since we receive over 1000 citizen concerns per year, we may not be able to investigate your request as quickly as we would like. We appreciate your patience and understanding in this matter.*

# Speed Limits



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<http://www.macombgov.org/roads>

### References used to produce this brochure:

- ❖ Transportation and Traffic Engineering Handbook
- ❖ Michigan Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices
- ❖ Michigan State Police Standards for Traffic Engineering Investigations
- ❖ Uniform Vehicle Code, National Committee on Uniform Laws and Ordinances