

- **Speed Limits and Speed Humps**

SPEED LIMITS

Speed limits are often taken for granted and until a problem arises, most people pay little attention to the theory behind them. The following information will help you understand how speed zones are established, and what they can and cannot do.

SPEED LIMIT MISCONCEPTIONS

When traffic problems occur concerned citizens frequently ask why we don't lower the speed limit. There are widely held misconceptions that speed limit signs will slow the speed of traffic, reduce accidents and increase safety. Most drivers drive at a speed which they consider to be appropriate, 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 speed limits and accident frequency.

SPEED LAWS

All fifty states base their speed regulations on the Basic Speed Law. "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 55 MPH. All other speed limits are called prima facie limits, which are considered by law to be safe and prudent under normal conditions. Certain prima facie limits established by state law include the 25 MPH speed limit in residential districts, 25 MPH in school zones when children are present, and the 15 MPH speed limit in alleys, and at intersections and railroad crossings, where visibility is limited. These speed limits do not need to be posted to be enforced.

Speed limits between 25 and 55 MPH must be established on the basis of traffic engineering surveys. These surveys include an analysis of roadway conditions, accident records, and a sampling of the prevailing speed of traffic. A safe and reasonable limit is set at or below the speed at which 85% of average traffic moves.

Traffic flowing at a uniform speed results in increased safety and fewer accidents. Drivers are less impatient, pass less often, and tailgate less which reduces rear-end collisions.

The posting of the appropriate speed limit simplifies the job of enforcement officers, since most of the traffic is voluntarily moving at the posted speed. Blatant speeders are easily spotted, safe drivers are not penalized, and traffic officers aren't asked to enforce unrealistic and arbitrary speed limits.

SPEED HUMPS

Speeding on residential streets is a common complaint reported by concerned citizens. Speed humps are often requested because they are perceived as a quick and effective solution to speeding. Research has shown, however, that speed humps are not necessarily an effective traffic control device.

WHAT ARE SPEED HUMPS?

On public streets speed humps are 12 feet long by 3 inches high ridges of pavement placed across a roadway which theoretically forces cars to slow down as they pass over them. They are intended to be uncomfortable to drive over when crossed too quickly.

ARE SPEED HUMPS EFFECTIVE?

Speed humps are still considered experimental roadway features. Several tests throughout the world on speed humps have raised questions about their effectiveness. Test results indicate:

- Speed humps do not significantly reduce vehicle speeds once the vehicle has left the speed hump. In fact, the discomfort and shock sometimes decrease as vehicle speeds increase.
- Speed humps cannot be designed to meet the specifications for all types of light-weight and heavy-weight vehicles successfully.
- Traffic volumes on streets adjacent to streets where the humps are located increase if drivers try to avoid the speed humps.
- Speed humps increase noise levels when wheels hit the pavement. Increased noise is particularly bothersome in residential areas.

If you have any questions, requests or suggestions concerning traffic control, call the Traffic Engineering Division (714) 765-5183.