

How are speed limits set?

The answer to this question varies depending upon a number of factors. The primary rules governing the establishment of speed limits, however, are identified in the portion of state law known as the Michigan Vehicle Code (<http://www.michigan.gov/msp>).

The Michigan Vehicle Code is based on the premise that drivers should, at all times drive at "reasonable and proper" speeds, given the conditions. The law states;

"A person operating a vehicle on a highway shall operate that vehicle at a careful and prudent speed not greater than nor less than is reasonable and proper, having due regard to the traffic, surface and width of the highway and of any other condition existing at the time. A person shall not operate a vehicle upon a highway at a speed greater than that which will permit a stop within the assured clear distance ahead".

Traffic Limit Study Requests

A request for a traffic study should be provided to the RCKC by Township Resolution request. A standard resolution format can be provided by calling RCKC engineering department. The request by resolution is important, as pending the results a speed limit may also be increased.

Who sets speed limits?

State law assigns the responsibility for setting speed limits on our county roads to the Michigan State Police (MSP) in conjunction with the local county road commissions and Township officials.

In order for a speed limit to be changed, the MSP, Township and Road Commission work in conjunction and a change is based on a proper traffic study.

For more information:
The Road Commission of
Kalamazoo County will be happy to
answer any further questions
or concerns.



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Setting Realistic Speed Limits



Unposted Speed Limits

The Michigan Vehicle Code sets speed limits for roads even where no speed limit is posted. These unposted speed limits are identified in the law as:

Subdivisions: The speed limit is 25 mph in residential subdivisions which consist of a system of interconnected highways with no through highways and a limited number of entrances and exits from the subdivision.



Highways: On highways where a speed limit is not otherwise posted, the General Speed Limit is 55 mph.

Gravel Roads: On all gravel or unimproved surfaces where a speed limit is not otherwise posted, the General Gravel Road Speed Limit is 55 mph.



Modified Speed Limits

When the General Speed Limit is considered too high on a county road, the MSP, in conjunction with the road commission and township officials determines the “reasonable and proper” speed for the road whether too high or too low.

Road agencies around the country have established standardized methods for determining reasonable and proper speeds. These methods include engineering and traffic studies that examine such things as traffic volume, accident rates, number of driveways, sight obstructions, etc., pedestrian activities and potential hazards that might not easily be detected by drivers.

If these studies reveal no unusual safety problems, road agencies typically will apply a rule known as the 85th percentile speed to establish the speed limit.

The 85th percentile speed is the speed at or below which is 85 percent of traffic is moving. Tests indicate that posting speed limits higher or lower than driven by 85 percent of drivers does not significantly change the speed of those drivers.

The 85th percentile rule recognizes that the other 15 percent of drivers are driving above a reasonable and proper speed, given the conditions. Studies indicate that this 15 percent of drivers causes a disproportionate number of accidents and has the worst driving record.



Speed Limit Myths and Realities

Myth #1: Speed limits significantly affect traffic speeds.

Reality: Traffic speeds do not significantly change following the posting of new or revised speed limits. Most drivers travel at speeds that they consider safe, regardless of the speed limit.

Myth #2: Most drivers travel too fast for road conditions.

Reality: The majority of drivers travel at prudent speeds and are capable of recognizing driving conditions that require greater driving caution.

Myth #3: Lower speed limits result in safer roads.

Reality: The more uniform the speeds of vehicles in a traffic stream, the less chance there is for conflict and crashes. Speed limits that reflect the normal actions of the reasonable majority, therefore, usually provide the most uniform speeds. In fact, unrealistically low speed limits may actually lead to crashes by producing two distinct groups of drivers – those attempting to observe the speed limit and those driving at what they feel are 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.

Myth #4: Lower speed limits allow for effective enforcement.

Reality: Unrealistically low speed limits cannot be enforced with reasonable enforcement. In addition, they make the behavior of the majority unlawful and create public antagonism toward the police. However, realistic speed limits (i.e., those that reflect the normal actions of the reasonable majority) allow police to target their enforcement efforts to those drivers clearly out of line with the normal flow of traffic.