

School Zones

School speed zones are established for the protection of students walking to and from school. According to state law, the speed limit in school zones must be set at 25 mph. If there are sidewalks, the school zone speed limit can only be 15 mph below the posted speed for the road, but not less than 25 mph.

School zones are established by the request of the School District's Superintendent of an educational institution which is generally defined as the portion of the road "1,000 feet from the property line of the school in each direction".

State law also dictates that a school zone speed can be in effect only from 30-60 minutes before the first class begins until the beginning of classes; from school dismissal until 30-60 minutes after the last class; and during the lunch period if students are permitted to leave the school.

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 state freeways cannot exceed 70 mph. In many places, though, the maximum is 65 mph, and in some places it is 55 mph (typically in congested urban areas). State law also mandates a minimum freeway speed of 45 mph. However, for trucks weighing 10,000 pounds or more, or truck-tractors with trailers, the maximum speed limit on any Michigan road, including freeways, is 55 mph.

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.

Speed Limits



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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 position 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;

“Any person driving a vehicle on a highway shall drive at a careful and prudent speed not greater than nor less than what is reasonable and proper, having due regard to the traffic, surface and width of the highway and of any other conditions: and no person shall drive any vehicle upon a highway at a speed greater than will permit him to bring it to a stop within the assured clear distance ahead”.

Prima Facie Speed Limits

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

Business District: The prima facie speed limit in business districts is 25 mph.

Parks: Unless a different speed is posted, the prima facie speed limit in parks is also 25 mph.

Highways: on highways outside of residential or business districts, if no speed limit is posted, the prima facie speed limit is 55 mph.

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.

Traffic Limit Study Requests

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



Non-Prima Facie Speed Limits

When the prima facie 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, the 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.

