

## Speed Limits – 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 limit. 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 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.

**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.

**Why do we need speed limits?**  
The purpose of a speed limit is to provide a combination of safety for motorists and pedestrians, fluid and consistent movement of traffic that is fitting with surrounding areas.



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The Saginaw County Road Commission (SCRC) understands that speed limits on primary and local roadways within the county are a concern to residents and is committed to providing reasonable speed limits that are not only safe, but move traffic in an efficient manner.

## How Speed Limits Are Determined

Current law provides for a three-member committee made up of one representative from the Township, one representative from the Road Commission and one representative from the Michigan State Police to review speed matters. Requests to review the speed limit on any road must meet the following criteria:

- ♦ Written request received from the Township Board or Supervisor,
- ♦ Request must be for a paved road,
- ♦ Road must be county primary or local road
- ♦ Study must be completed by Committee

## The 85th Percentile Speed

The 85th Percentile Speed Rule is one of the factors reviewed in order to establish a proper, realistic speed limit. Studies are conducted to determine the speed that 85 percent of all motorists drive in the area. In order for any traffic law to be enforceable, voluntary compliance must be

practiced by the vast majority of drivers so that violators can be easily identified. This 85th percentile speed is determined during a speed study conducted the SCRC. Other factors reviewed during the study are crash data, access points, and traffic counts.

## Prima facia 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 facia” speed limits. The prima facia speed limits identified in the law are:

- Residential and business streets: Where no speed limit is posted, the prima facia limit on paved or gravel residential streets and streets in business districts is 25 mph.
- Parks: Unless a different speed is posted, the prima facia 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 facia speed limit is 55 mph.



## 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 students walk to the school and there are no sidewalks. 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 only for elementary and middle schools, and are 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, from school dismissal until 30-60 minutes after, and during lunch if the students leave the premises.