

**S**peed zoning, when used with an overall traffic plan, helps traffic move more safely and efficiently. However, it does not provide a quick fix for land-use problems or poor traffic patterns. Instead, speed zoning reflects a reasonable balance between the needs of drivers, pedestrians and bicyclists using public roads for travel and for those who live along these roads.



If you have questions about speed zoning, please contact:

Oregon Department of Transportation  
State Traffic Engineer  
4040 Fairview Industrial Drive SE  
Salem, OR 97302-1142

Phone: (503) 986-3568

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Or visit our Web site at:

[www.oregon.gov/ODOT/HWY/TRAFFIC-ROADWAY/speed\\_zone\\_program.shtml](http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/HWY/TRAFFIC-ROADWAY/speed_zone_program.shtml)



# SETTING SPEEDS



Setting speed zones on Oregon's highways and streets is often a controversial and emotional issue.

Many citizens believe that lowering the speed will improve traffic safety on their street or in their community. On the other hand, speed zones that are unrealistic are often disregarded by a majority of motorists who are normally careful and law-abiding drivers.



## THE LOGIC OF SPEED ZONES

Extensive studies from around the U.S. show that traffic moving at a speed that is reasonable for the

road and weather conditions results in fewer accidents. Drivers are more patient because a reasonably uniform speed allows progress with less passing, less delay and fewer rear-end collisions. Lowering the speed does not necessarily result in fewer crashes.



The Basic Rule does not allow motorists to drive faster than the posted speed or designated speed. Instead, the Rule expects drivers to be responsible for their own actions.

## SPEED ZONE STANDARDS

In the absence of posted speed limits, Oregon state law gives motorists the following designated speeds:

- 15 mph** - Alleys, narrow residential streets
- 20 mph** - Business districts, school zones
- 25 mph** - Residential districts, public parks, ocean shores;
- 55 mph** - Open and rural highways, trucks on interstate highways
- 65 mph** - Autos on interstate highways

## THE BASIC RULE

Designated and posted speeds are not the final word in Oregon, for all travel on public streets and highways is subject to the Basic Rule. The Basic Rule is both a safety valve and an acknowledgement that drivers are able to act independently, reasonably and with good judgment.

The Rule states that a motorist must drive at a speed that is reasonable and prudent at all times by considering other traffic, road and weather conditions, dangers at intersections and any other conditions that affect safety and speed.

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A SPEED ZONE CHANGE IS REQUESTED?

The Oregon Department of Transportation has the responsibility to investigate most public roads at the request of the road authority.

When a city or county asks the Department to review a speed zone, an engineering study is started. The road is surveyed for the following:

- lane and shoulder widths
- signals and stop signs
- number of intersections and other accesses
- roadside development
- parking and bicycle lanes

Other analysis includes:

- number and type of vehicles
- number of pedestrians and cyclists
- crash history
- speed checks

Radar and laser are used in speed checks, recording free flow traffic. Recognizing that most motorists are generally safe, the speed at or below which 85 percent of the drivers travel is one nationally recognized factor proven by repeated studies as a fair and objective indication of safe and reasonable speeds.

When the investigation is completed, a report is prepared. All of the above considerations are evaluated in deciding whether to propose a change, or retain the existing posted speed. The report is then sent to the agency with road authority for review.

## WHO DECIDES?

If the road authority agrees with the recommendation, the speed zone is established. If not, ODOT reviews the road authority's objection and any additional information, and then if possible comes to a mutual agreement. If mutual agreement can't be reached, the case is referred to the Speed Zone Review Panel.

## SPEED ZONE REVIEW PANEL

The Speed Zone Review Panel hears contested speed zone cases. The panel reviews the speed zone recommendation and receives testimony from the local agency and interested parties.

The panel consists of representatives from the League of Oregon Cities, Association of Oregon Counties, Oregon Transportation Safety Committee, Oregon State Police and ODOT.

