

NOT JUST A RANDOM CHOICE

In your own neighborhood or work area, you want people to travel at a slow to moderate speed. If you are driving through someone else's neighborhood or work area, you want to be able to travel quickly and smoothly.

People have been trying to solve this problem since the second set of prehistoric wheels rolled down the road. This issue is still with us today as more and more wheels-and people and goods-need to move safely and efficiently on our road and streets. Fortunately, the rules of the road have kept pace with improved technology and our growing population, and our laws for speed zones are based upon logic and human consideration.

Speed zoning used with an overall traffic plan helps traffic move more safely and efficiently. It does not provide a quick fix for land use problems or poor traffic problems; instead speed zoning attempts to establish a reasonable balance between the needs of drivers, pedestrians, and cyclists using public roads for travel and those who live and work along these roads.

THE LOGIC OF SPEED ZONES

American law follows the basic idea that most people are reasonable, and laws exist to control the few who are unreasonable or inconsiderate. The posted speed zones follow the same idea. The methods for establishing speed zones are based upon careful studies that have been performed in Oregon and throughout the United States.

These studies show that traffic moving at a speed that is reasonable for the road and weather conditions result in fewer accidents.

Drivers are more patient because a reasonably uniform speed allows progress with less passing, less delay, and fewer rear-end collisions.

Many people believe that lowering posted speeds will mean fewer accidents, but studies do not prove this. Unrealistically low speeds frustrate many drivers, resulting in numerous speeding violations and unsafe driving actually causing more accidents. Some motorists may try to make time by taking a shortcut through residential or other areas that are not suited for higher speeds and increased number of cars. Drivers lose respect for the law, and police and courts are overloaded with increased traffic tickets.

SPEED ZONE STANDARDS

State statutes give Oregon motorists the following designated speed zone standards:

15 MPH	Alleys;
20 MPH	Business Districts, school zones;
25 MPH	Residential Districts, public parks, ocean shores;
55 MPH	Open and rural highways; urban interstate highways, trucks on rural highways;
65 MPH	autos on rural interstate highways.

Posted speed zone signs, such as those designated 35 MPH or 45 MPH, override these standards. Designated and posted speeds however, are not the final word in Oregon. All travel on public streets and highways is subject to the Basic Rule.

BASIC RULE

The Basic Rule states that motorists 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. The Basic Rule does not allow motorists to drive faster than the posted speed, nor does it set absolute speeds designated for all conditions. Instead, the Rule expects drivers to be responsible for their own actions.

Sudden braking at 25 mph on ice or snow in a zone posted at 30 mph can cause the driver to lose control of the vehicle. In this case, the ice or snow has made the posted speed unreasonable and so the posted speed may still be in violation of the Basic Rule.

WHO DECIDES?

Who sets speed zones that limit travel to 30, 35, 40, and 45 mph, and so on? These designations are set by human decisions and state regulations. In Oregon, these decisions for most roads are made jointly by the Oregon Department of Transportation and the local road authority, the City.

The Oregon Department of Transportation has the responsibility to investigate roads at the request of the City for speed zone changes, and to make recommendations following established standards. When all the studies are completed, a report with photographs detailing the existing conditions and proposed changes is prepared. The report is then sent to the City for review. The City reviews these recommendations. If the City agrees with the recommendation, the speed zone is established. If not, the Oregon Department of Transportation reviews the City's

objections and any additional information, then if possible, revises the recommendation.

If no agreement can be reached, the speed zone decision is referred to a hearings panel that reviews the information and receives testimony from interested parties. The final decision is then made by the hearings panel. The panel has five members including representatives from the Transportation Safety Committee, the Oregon State Police, the Association of Oregon Counties, the League of Oregon Cities, and the Department of Transportation.

CONSIDERATIONS

All of the following considerations are evaluated in deciding whether to propose a change or retain the posted speed zone: accident history, roadway widths, surface type, number of lanes, shoulders, traffic control (signals and stop signs), number of intersections and other accesses, extent of roadside development, and other conditions such as allowed parking and bicycle lanes.

Additionally, tests are conducted that provide information such as the number and type of vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists using the road. Radar is used to perform spot speed checks, recording the speed of at least 75 vehicles in each travel direction. Recognizing that most of us are generally safe drivers, 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.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For more information, please contact the City of Hillsboro Engineering Division at (503) 681-6146 or check our website at www.ci.hillsboro.or.us/Engineering/.

OTHER INFORMATION SERIES TOPICS

Additional information series brochures are also available through the City of Hillsboro Engineering Division on the following topics:

- STOP SIGNS
- NEIGHBORHOOD TRAFFIC CALMING
- VISUAL CLEAR ZONES

CITY OF HILLSBORO

INFORMATION SERIES

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SPEED ZONING



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