

## What is a variable speed limit?

Variable speed limits change depending on road, traffic, or weather conditions. The signs are displayed only when relevant and contribute significantly to improving safety by restricting speeds during adverse conditions or times of increased risk, eg when children are arriving at or leaving school. This option is now more widely available to communities than in the past.

## How can variable speed limits improve safety?

Research has shown reducing vehicle speeds to 40km/h or less significantly reduces the level of injury if a child is struck by a vehicle.

Variable signs, which are displayed only when relevant, are the safest and fairest way to regulate speeds in school zones and may actually enhance driver acceptance of any restriction imposed.

However, Christchurch research shows that 40km/h variable speed limits are only effective when there is sufficient school related pedestrian activity on the road to remind drivers of the need to slow down.

## What if our school has little pedestrian activity?

To achieve compliance with a 40km/h speed limit when there is little school pedestrian activity will require considerable engineering to create a low speed environment.

At rural schools with high operating speeds, it is unlikely that motorists will slow to 40km/h in the short length of a school zone. To achieve compliance with a 40km/h speed limit it might be necessary to reduce the permanent speed limit near the school to 80km/h or less.

Examples of the engineering likely to be required to encourage compliance with the reduced permanent speed limit, include:

- 'rural gateways' – which include very large signs indicating both speed limit and locality
- lane narrowing
- coloured or textured road surface treatments.

Ongoing community involvement, education and enforcement campaigns are also critical for success.

## How can you be involved?

You have the opportunity to be involved in setting speed limits through your road controlling authority's consultation process. If you want to request a review of an existing limit, please contact your local city or district council in the first instance.

To request a review of a speed limit on a state highway, please contact your local NZTA office.

Read more about this in the brochure *Speed limits: How you can be involved* on the NZTA's website or search for 'Land Transport Rule: Setting of Speed Limits 2003'.

## For more information on variable speed limits in school zones

For more information on the installation of variable speed limits at schools, please refer to the NZTA's website [www.nzta.govt.nz](http://www.nzta.govt.nz) and search for 'Traffic note 37'.

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# Safe speeds around schools



## Concerned about speeding around your school?

The roads outside schools are often perceived as dangerous for children. This is due to the range of functions the road must serve immediately before and after school. Typically there are pedestrians and cyclists, and vehicles are being parked and manoeuvred outside the school. A large number of vehicles may travel past the school, sometimes at high speed.

If you're concerned about speeding on the road outside your school, you can request that your road controlling authority (council) review the traffic management arrangements in the school zone. This includes the use of variable speed limits at urban and rural schools.

The NZ Transport Agency (NZTA) has recently revised the conditions under which road controlling authorities may install 40km/h variable speed limits in school zones.



## How can councils contribute to safety outside schools?

There is a range of traffic management tools available for road controlling authorities to provide a safe environment outside schools, including:

- pedestrian crossing facilities
- pick-up and set-down areas separated from through traffic
- permanent warning signs
- active signs, which operate only when there is school related activity on the road outside the school
- 40km/h variable speed limits.

Traffic management in school zones is most effective when done in conjunction with school travel plans and neighbourhood accessibility plans which involve the wider community.

## What measures make the best contribution to safety?

From a road safety perspective, the best way to manage traffic is to separate the different activities from each other. At schools where many children are driven to school in cars or buses, providing a safe set-down and pick-up area, separated from passing traffic, is the preferred solution.

Alternatively, providing access to the school from a side road rather than the main road passing the school, also helps to separate the different functions of the road. Separating the school traffic and passing traffic is usually the best solution at rural schools where most children travel by car or bus.

However, in some situations it isn't possible to install separate facilities and sometimes other traffic management tools do not result in lower speeds of through traffic.

At schools where there is considerable pedestrian or cyclist activity on the road combined with high traffic volumes and high speeds, it may be desirable to install a 40km/h variable speed limit to achieve a lower speed environment before and after school.