Considerations when setting and reviewing speed limits

Here are some things road controlling authorities take into account when setting speed limits:

- Speed limits must make sense to drivers. Motorists are less likely to comply with speed limits that are seen as too low for the road. Realistic and credible limits are observed by most drivers, and are more effective in regulating speeds and reducing crashes.

- Lowering a speed limit does not always lower vehicle speeds. If speed limits are in place but not observed by many drivers, it can provide a false sense of security for other road users, particularly pedestrians. Unrealistically low speed limits can give people the impression that drivers are travelling slower than they actually are. While reducing a speed limit has some impact on driver speeds, the main factors influencing a driver’s choice of speed are the road environment and the traffic and journey conditions.

- The ‘speed limit’ and a ‘safe speed’ may differ. The speed limit is the maximum legal speed for a driver on the road in perfect conditions. Drivers should adjust their speeds to the conditions, including weather, traffic congestion, pedestrians on the road and activity from roadside areas such as schools, shopping centres and leisure facilities.

- The speed limit should support what the road is used for. Different roads can have different functions. Some are designed and located to make walking and cycling the preferred, safe and easy option (30km/h), others are better suited to a mixed use by cars, buses, and pedestrians (40–60km/h), while some are better suited only to cars, heavy vehicles and freight movement (50–100km/h).

How can you be involved?

You have the opportunity to be involved in setting new speed limits through your road controlling authority’s consultation process.

If you want to request a review of an existing limit on a local road, 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.

For more information

For more information on the setting of speed limits, please refer to the NZTA’s website www.nzta.govt.nz and search for ‘Land Transport Rule: Setting of Speed Limits 2003’.
The legislation in a nutshell

• A speed limit can be changed, following review and consultation, if a different limit would be safe and appropriate according to the nature, function and use of the road.

• In urban areas a permanent speed limit lower than 50km/h may be set where the road has been engineered so that travel speeds are not more than 5km/h over the lower limit.

Communities can influence decisions on speed limits

Legislation requires road controlling authorities to consult local communities that are affected by a proposed speed limit change, giving them the opportunity to be involved in the process.

You can also request that your road controlling authority review an existing speed limit.

As speed limits are not looked at in isolation and many factors are taken into account when setting them, your views will be valuable in shaping decisions on safe solutions. Changing speed limits is most effective for improving safety on our roads when undertaken as part of a package of actions.

A Safe System approach, as outlined in Safer Journeys: New Zealand's road safety strategy 2010–2020 (www.saferjourneys.govt.nz), looks at all parts of the roading system:

• Safe road use.
• Safe roads and roadsides.
• Safe speeds.
• Safe vehicles.

All these elements are looked at as a whole as part of the bigger safety picture.

As part of Safer Journeys, the NZTA will be reviewing New Zealand’s current speed management policy so that it better reflects a Safe System approach to setting speed limits across New Zealand. Setting speed limits using a Safe System approach may require changes to current legislation.