

WYDOT Quick Facts

# SPEED LIMITS



## Speed limits are for your safety

Speed limits are set to protect your safety. The familiar black and white regulatory signs inform drivers of the legal allowable speed, communicating a basic element of safe driving to the motorist.

Uniform vehicle speeds needed for safe traffic flow can only be achieved through consistent methods of speed zone establishment, uniform sign design and placement, effective speed zone enforcement and driver compliance.

WYDOT has prepared this brochure to answer frequently asked questions about the process for setting or changing speed limits.



## What is the purpose of a speed limit?

Properly established speed limits can improve safety by reducing the frequency and severity of crashes. A speed limit sign notifies drivers of the maximum speed considered safe during favorable weather and visibility.

Speed limits set a standard under which drivers can react safely to problems encountered on the road. Properly set limits provide uniform traffic flow and balance risk and travel time, resulting in fewer crashes and the efficient use of the road's capacity.



## Who sets speed limits for Wyoming roads

Federal law gives individual states the authority to establish their own maximum speed limits.

The Legislature has set the maximum limits for roads in Wyoming at 80 mph on interstate highways, 30 mph in urban areas, and 20 mph in designated school zones with signs posted indicating a reduced limit.

For all other locations, the limits are set at 55 mph on unpaved roads and 70 mph on paved roads.

WYDOT, cities, towns and counties can set speed limits that vary from those statutory limits for specific road sections under their jurisdiction only after an engineering and traffic study is completed by a licensed engineer.

## What effect do posted speed limits have on actual traffic speeds?

Speed limit signs have little effect on traffic speed, but enforcement of posted speed limits has a profound effect.

Raising a speed limit does not necessarily result in faster driving speeds and more crashes, and lowering a speed limit does not necessarily result in slower driving speeds and fewer crashes.

Speed limits must be realistic to gain compliance. Research indicates about 85 percent of all drivers travel at reasonably safe speeds for the road conditions they encounter, regardless of speed limit signs.

The remaining 15 percent of drivers must be reminded of the speed limit, and there must be meaningful enforcement of the limit.

Posting proper speed limits smoothes the flow of traffic and aids effective law enforcement. Unrealistically low speed limits invite violation by responsible drivers. Enforcing unreasonably low limits creates the perception of a “speed trap.”



## How are speed limits determined?

The process for determining reasonable and safe speed limits is divided into two phases: the engineering investigation and the traffic investigation. The engineering investigation looks at the geometric design of the road, including alignment, terrain, lane and shoulder width and pavement type and condition. Also considered are commercial and residential development, parking and the number and types of entrances, exits and intersecting streets.

The traffic investigation involves gathering and analyzing traffic volumes, prevailing vehicle speeds, crash numbers and traffic control devices affecting or affected by vehicle speeds.

## What are variable speed limits?

The Legislature has given WYDOT the authority to vary the speed limit on localized highway sections based on road, weather and traffic conditions. Electronic variable speed limit signs have been installed on highway sections prone to challenging weather conditions.

The electronic signs allow WYDOT's Transportation Management Center to adjust the speed limit in 5 mph increments to whatever speed is appropriate for safe travel based on the recommendations of Highway Patrol troopers and snowplow drivers assessing the conditions on the highway section.

Signs are posted in advance of the variable speed limit zones to alert drivers they will need to adjust their speed. The reduced limits are strictly enforced.

## What factors influence a driver's selected speed?

A driver's choice of speed is a balance between expedience and safety, and may be influenced by the presence of other vehicles, weather, road conditions and road geometrics. Other factors include the length, purpose and urgency of the trip, whether the driver is late or on time, ambient light and time of day, driver skill and familiarity with the road, condition of vehicle, the personality and emotional condition of the driver and the presence or history of law enforcement.

## How can I get drivers to slow down in my neighborhood?

Studies show reducing a speed limit will not cause speeding motorists to slow down. When determining speed limits, engineers attempt to set a realistic limit that the majority of drivers will obey and that can be reasonably enforced.

Contact the Wyoming Highway Patrol, county sheriff or your local police if motorists are traveling at speeds higher than posted in your neighborhood.

## How do I get a speed limit on a state highway reviewed?

If you feel there is a need to change a speed limit on a state highway, or you have further questions concerning speed limits, send a written request to the nearest WYDOT district traffic engineer, district engineer or public involvement specialist.

For more information contact the WYDOT public involvement specialist in your area of the state:

Southeast, 745-2142;

Central, 473-3303;

Southwest, 352-3065;

Northeast, 674-2356; or

Northwest, 856-1341.



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