

**TECH BRIEF 2014-4**  
**Updated 2023**

## **PROPER POSTING OF SPEED LIMITS**

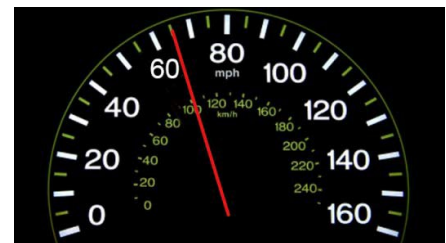
### *What is speeding, and why is the posting of proper speed limit signs important?*

Speeding, defined as exceeding the speed limit or driving too fast for conditions, is one of the most common factors in traffic crashes. For more than two decades, speeding has been involved in approximately one-third of all motor vehicle fatalities nationwide. In 2021, speeding was a contributing factor in 29% of all traffic fatalities, claiming a total of 12,330 lives. Additionally, in crashes where roadway function class was known, 87% of speeding-related traffic fatalities occurred on non-interstate roadways. (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 2023)

All speed limits on Connecticut public roads, whether owned by the state or town, must be approved by the Office of the State Traffic Administration (OSTA) unless the municipality has assumed the responsibility as allowed per legislation passed in 2021. This legislation permits the municipal governing board to give the responsibility and authority to the Local Traffic Authority to establish, modify, and maintain speed limits on all local streets, highways and bridges or in any parking area for ten cars or more or on any private road wholly within the municipality under its jurisdiction, without approval from the OSTA, subject to certain requirements.

### **WHY ARE SPEED LIMITS ESTABLISHED?**

Speed limits are established to move traffic in a uniform and safe manner. In Connecticut, the OSTA, in conjunction with the Local Traffic Authorities (LTA) of the individual towns/cities, establishes speed limits for all public roads. In Connecticut, the legislature has established a statewide maximum speed limit of 65 mph.



Speed limits on all public roads are established for ideal driving conditions and must be approved by the OSTA unless the municipality has taken over the responsibility for locally owned roads. During inclement weather, motorists should adjust their operating speeds accordingly. In addition, no motorist should operate a motor vehicle at a rate of speed or in such a manner as to endanger the lives of vehicle occupants or any other person. Any infringement of these common sense practices shall be considered a violation (Connecticut General State Statutes 14-218a Traveling Unreasonably Fast; 14-219 Speeding and 14-222 Reckless Driving).

The OSTA, in cooperation with town/city officials, also establishes speed limits on locally maintained roads in municipalities that have not assumed the responsibility. However, speed limits are not normally established on unimproved, dirt, or gravel roads because of variations in seasonal roadway surfaces. Roads of insufficient length (usually 500' or less) do not warrant or need a speed limit.

## **HOW DOES THE CT OSTA DETERMINE THE REGULATORY SPEED LIMITS?**

The OSTA sets regulatory speed limits on state and local roads based on an engineering investigation. Principal factors considered are:

- road type and surface (curve, hill, etc.)
- location and type of access points (intersections, entrances, etc.)
- existing traffic control devices (signs, signals, etc.)
- accident history
- traffic volume
- sight distances
- test drive results
- radar observations

Radar speed observations are an important part of the traffic investigation. When choosing a speed, drivers take many roadway environment factors into consideration. Therefore, the speed that the majority of people consider prudent is an important value. Data is collected and the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speed is determined. This is the value indicating the speed under which most (85%) drivers are travelling at or below. Experience has shown that a posted speed limit near this value is the safe and reasonable speed. However, there are exceptions (high accident frequency, volumes, etc.).

Engineering judgement is a very important tool. The traffic investigator must use knowledge of nationally accepted principles combined with experience to assign the safe speed.

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### ***What are the types of speed limits?***

#### **REGULATORY SPEED LIMIT**

This black and white sign shows the maximum speed that a motorist may travel under ideal conditions. It must be authorized by the OSTA after consulting with the LTA of the town/city in which it is placed unless the municipality has assumed responsibility for local speed limits.



## ADVISORY SPEEDS



Engineers erect advisory speed plates to advise drivers of the recommended speeds for specific roadway conditions, such as horizontal curves, exit ramps, or steep downgrades. The roadway condition warrants a lower speed than the general or posted speed limit, but rather than lowering the limit at each such location, traffic engineers post an advisory speed plate instead. Advisory speeds are not legally enforceable except under the basic speed law, which states that motorists must operate at speeds that are reasonable and prudent for conditions.

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## *What are special types of speed zones?*

### SCHOOL SPEED LIMITS IN SCHOOL ZONES

These can be established on state roads after an investigation by the Division of Traffic Engineering and approval by the OSTA, or local roads after an investigation and approval by the OSTA. The school speed limit which is approved by the OSTA is in effect during school hours noted on a sub-mounted sign or when the lights attached to the sign assembly are flashing. The school plate crown is black and fluorescent yellow-green and the speed limit sign is black and white.



### PEDESTRIAN SAFETY ZONES



Municipalities can establish Pedestrian Safety Zones on local roads without OSTA approval in downtown districts or community centers where there is a high level of pedestrian activity. Such zones may also be established adjacent to hospital properties. Municipalities may establish Pedestrian Safety Zones on local roads without accepting the authority to establish and modify all speed limits on local roads.

### SPEED LIMITS IN WORK ZONES



Advisory speed limits are used to identify recommended speeds for a specific condition within a work zone. The signs are installed by the appropriate governing authority. These black and orange signs are used in advance of work areas.

Temporary construction zone speed limits are regulatory speed limits established for long term construction projects or detour routes. These black and white signs are used when a reduced speed is needed for driver safety. Valid 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, these signs are installed under the authority of the OSTA for any roadway.



## Questions & Answers

### Won't lowering the speed limit reduce speeds?

NO. Studies show that there is little change in the speed pattern after the posting of a speed limit. The driver is much more influenced by the roadway conditions.

### Will lowering the speed limit reduce accident frequency?



NO. Although lowering the speed limit is often seen as a cure-all in preventing crashes, this is not the case. Crashes are most often the result of driver inattention and driver error. If a posted speed limit is unrealistically low, it creates a speed variance (i.e., some drivers follow the speed limit while most drive at a reasonable speed). This speed variance can contribute to crashes.

### Why do we even have speed limits?

The uniform speed of vehicles in a traffic flow results in the safest operation. The posted speed limits can keep the traffic flowing smoothly provided the majority of drivers find the speed limits reasonable. To do this, the limits must be consistent throughout the state. The speed limits also give the motorist an idea of a reasonable speed to drive in an unfamiliar location. The speed limits are used by police officials to identify excessive speeds and curb unreasonable behavior.

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## Whom do I contact?

### EXPRESSWAYS

For regulatory and advisory speed limit information on the expressway system, you may contact the OSTA.

If you believe there is a safety concern or an inappropriate speed limit posted, the person to contact depends on the type of road. See below:

### UNLIMITED ACCESS STATE HIGHWAYS AND LOCAL ROADWAYS

For these roadways, you may contact your LTA of the town in question who, if in agreement, will make a formal request to the OSTA.

### FOR REGULATORY SPEED LIMITS.

The LTA can contact the OSTA requesting an investigation for speed limits on local roads. Based upon the results, the OSTA, if in agreement, may then authorize the municipality to post new speed limits. **OR** The municipality can decide to allow the LTA to assume this responsibility.

### FOR ADVISORY SPEED PLATES.

You may contact your LTA concerning local or state roads. The LTA will forward concerns regarding state roads to the Department's Division of Traffic Engineering if deemed warranted.

### FOR SPEED LIMITS ON PRIVATE ROADS.

You may contact your LTA. These speed limits may be established without OSTA approval.

The telephone numbers and emails for state or local assistance can be found under government listings. If you are unable to find the contact information you are looking for, you may contact the Connecticut Department of Transportation at:

*Information Line* 1-860-594-2000

*Division of Traffic Engineering* 1-860-594-2711 [DOT.TrafficEngineering@ct.gov](mailto:DOT.TrafficEngineering@ct.gov)

*Office of the State Traffic Administration* 1-860-594-3020 [DOT.OSTA@ct.gov](mailto:DOT.OSTA@ct.gov)

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### ***A final safety note:***

Remember to always use good judgement and drive at a safe and reasonable speed for the existing conditions. This is every driver's responsibility.

Also, please be mindful that there is a heightened concern about the risk of distracted driving.

This information was supplied by the:  
CT Department of Transportation  
Division of Traffic Engineering  
2800 Berlin Turnpike  
Newington, CT 06131-7546

**The Department of Transportation OSTA website provides a list of approved speed limits for town roads at the link below:**

<http://www.ct.gov/dot/osta>

**The OSTA also created a guidance document that explains many of these topics in further detail. That document is linked below.**

[Guidelines-for-Establishing-Speed-Limits-in-the-State-of-Connecticut-102021.pdf](#)

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**For other Tech and Safety Briefs or more information about the CT Training & Technical Assistance Center, please visit us at:**  
[www.T2Center.uconn.edu](http://www.T2Center.uconn.edu)

