

Establishment of Speed Limits On State Highways

UDOT 06C-25

Effective: October 4, 1991

Revised: March 19, 2015

Purpose

To define the process for the Utah Department of Transportation (Department) establishing speed limits on state highways. Refer to Policy 06C-61 for establishing temporary speed limits in work zones.

Policy

It is the policy of the Department to establish speed limits on state highways on the basis of an engineering and traffic investigation according to the currently adopted edition of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) and according to Section 41-6A-601 and Section 41-6A-602 of the Utah Code Annotated. Speed zone studies will be conducted upon the request of the Region Director or the Region Traffic Operations Engineer.

It is the intent of the Department to review every speed limit every five years. This may or may not include a field review. The Department will also review the crash history or other conditions that may have changed, such as the number of travel lanes, signal coordination, or traffic lanes in conjunction with the speed limit review. The Region Traffic Operations Engineers can request speed limit studies in their respective regions at any time when significant changes occur on a roadway segment.

The posted speed limit is based on the 85th percentile speed giving consideration to:

1. Road surface characteristics, shoulder condition, grade, alignment, and sight distance.
2. Roadside development, culture, and roadside friction.
3. Safe speeds for curves or hazardous locations within the zone.
4. Pedestrian activity, parking practices, and other traffic.
5. Reported crash experience for the most recent three-year period.
6. Statutory speed limits.

Consideration may be given for a speed limit below the 85th percentile speed when the 85th percentile speed appears inappropriate based on the six factors above. Any reduction beyond rounding based on the 85th percentile speed should not exceed 5 mph.

A follow-up study will be made from between six to eighteen months later whenever the speed limit has been reduced below the 85th percentile speed as a result of the engineering and traffic investigation. The speed limit will then be adjusted to ensure that it is not more than 5 mph below the rounded 85th percentile speed if necessary. Local authorities will be consulted before any changes are made.

A temporary Traffic Engineering Order (TEO) may be generated for a speed limit that matches the design speed when an existing roadway undergoes a substantial change such as a major widening such that the design speed of the new roadway is different than the posted speed limit prior to construction. A follow up study should be done when the project is complete to determine whether the speed limit based on the design speed should be changed so that it is based on the 85th percentile speed considering the six factors described above.

A temporary TEO may be generated for a speed limit that matches the design speed when a new roadway is constructed and a speed limit is established based on the design speed. A follow up study should be done when the project is complete to determine whether the speed limit based on the design speed should be changed so that it is based on the 85th percentile speed considering the six factors described above.

The Deputy Director approves the recommendation and directs the Engineer for Traffic and Safety to issue a TEO when a speed limit is established in accordance with Utah Code section 41-6a-602 and has been recommended by the Engineer for Traffic and Safety to be a permanent speed limit.

An appeal process is available and is described later in this policy and procedure for cases where no speed limit reduction is recommended or if an increase in the speed limit is recommended and local authorities are not satisfied with the results of the Department study.

Procedures

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Responsibility: Region Director or Region Traffic Operations Engineer

Actions

1. Receive a request from a local jurisdiction to perform a speed zone study. This request should include reasons why the speed limit should be changed together with recommendations as to what the speed limit should be.
2. Request the Engineer for Traffic and Safety to conduct the necessary study.

Responsibility: Engineer for Traffic and Safety

3. Request that the Traffic and Safety Studies Engineer perform the necessary study.

Responsibility: Traffic and Safety Studies Engineer

4. Initiate field study to include three-year crash history, roadway geometry, roadside developments throughout the highway segment, pedestrian activity, school crossings, 85th percentile speed, and other considerations.
5. Evaluate data to determine appropriate speed limit according to the MUTCD.
6. Prepare study report and submit recommendations with appropriate supporting data to the Region Director and Region Traffic Operations Engineer.

Responsibility: Region Director or Region Traffic Operations Engineer

7. Inform local jurisdiction of study results and recommendations. Allow local jurisdiction to comment on the recommendations and schedule a meeting with local jurisdiction if necessary.

Responsibility: Local jurisdiction

8. Appeal the speed study recommendations to the Region Director, if desired. All appeals will be substantiated by facts and reliable data. The appeal will prove that a violation of Department Policy or MUTCD Standards has occurred or the appeal will be denied.

Responsibility: Region Director

9. Make speed limit change decisions, if any after consulting with the local jurisdiction or Region Traffic Operations Engineer or both. The Region Director will consult with the Deputy Director on final speed limit change decisions under 41-6a-602.

Responsibility: Region Traffic Operations Engineer

10. Request Engineer for Traffic and Safety to issue the appropriate TEO. Refer to Policy 06C-05.

Responsibility: Engineer for Traffic and Safety

11. Issue appropriate TEO according to Policy 06C-05.

Responsibility: Region Traffic Operations Engineer

12. Take appropriate steps to complete TEO execution, verify TEO completion, and return signed original TEO to the Traffic and Safety Division.