



School-Zone Speed Limits in Minnesota

Making Walking and Biking Safer

High speed roads and wide crossings can make walking or biking to school more dangerous and less enjoyable for students. When these types of dangers exist, students are far less likely to be allowed to walk or bike to school and may have to be bused across a dangerous intersection even when the student lives across the street from his or her school. A transportation system with safe walking or biking routes provides students with an opportunity for increased physical activity. Establishing safe school-zone speed limits is one way to make walking and biking safer. Roads can be made safer for children who choose to walk or bike to school when communities understand how school-zone speed limits are established and develop strategies to enforce these speed limits.

Q: Why is it important to establish school-zone speed limits?

A: High-speed motor vehicles pose a great risk of injury for pedestrians and bicyclists as they travel to and from schools. Reduced speeds allow motorists more time to avoid collisions. A motor vehicle traveling at 50 mph requires 424 feet to come to a complete stop, while a vehicle traveling at 25 mph requires only 152 feet.¹

Reducing vehicle speed also lessens the severity of injuries for pedestrians and bicyclists who are hit. A pedestrian hit by a vehicle traveling at 40 mph has an 85% likelihood of being killed, whereas the likelihood of death for a pedestrian hit by a vehicle traveling at 20 mph is only 5%.⁴

FIGURE 1: Pedestrian Injuries at Impact Speeds²

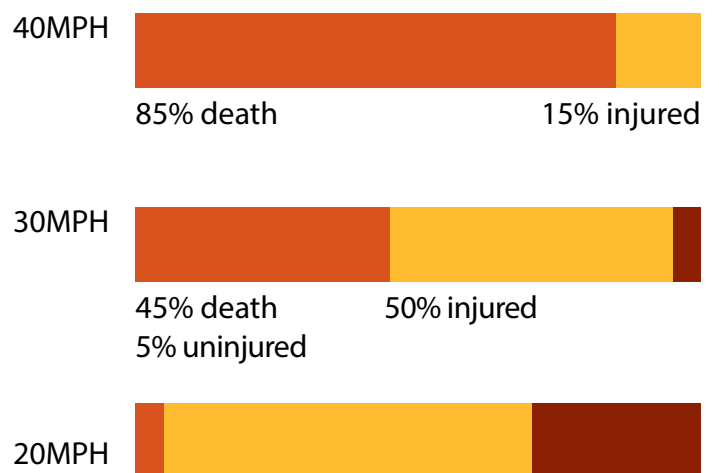
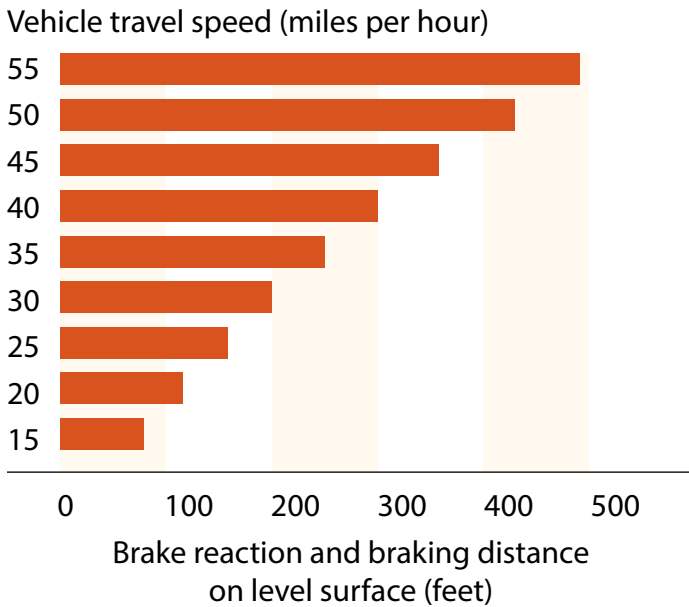


FIGURE 2: Stopping Sight Distance³

These statistics are similar to accidents between motor vehicles and bicyclists. There are several factors which more than double the probability of a bicyclist suffering a fatal injury in an accident, including when speeding is involved and at motor vehicle speeds above 30 mph. The largest effect is caused when estimated motor vehicle speed prior to impact is greater than 50 mph, where the probability of fatal injury increases more than 16 times.⁵

Q: What is a school-zone?

A: A school-zone is any section of road next to public or nonpublic school property where children can enter the road. Any established school crossing is also considered a school-zone.⁶

Q: How is a school-zone speed limit established?

A: Local authorities, including a county board, city council, or town board (but not a school district), may establish a school-zone speed limit upon the basis of an engineering and traffic investigation as instructed by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT).⁷ That investigation includes the preparation of

a school route plan identifying the paths that children follow as they travel to school. Any hazards along this route are identified so that the risk of injury can be reduced. Mn/DOT will suggest possible solutions to hazards such as increasing pedestrian visibility, improving signage, or reducing speed limits.⁸

On trunk highways, local authorities must work with Mn/DOT to get Mn/DOT's approval for establishing school-zone speed limits.⁹

Q: How does Mn/DOT conduct an engineering and traffic investigation?

A: An engineering and traffic investigation has two parts: preparing a school route plan and conducting a school-zone hazard evaluation. In preparing the school route plan, school and traffic officials develop a map of the area that shows streets, traffic controls, and established routes and school crossings. The plan attempts to minimize the number of crossings and maximize safety at crossings with the use of traffic control measures that are already in place. The other part of the investigation is the school-zone hazard evaluation. This evaluation involves identifying all of the possible hazards that children may encounter on their way to school. It involves collecting information about roadways, traffic volumes, pedestrian volumes, parking and loading zones, traffic control devices, sidewalks, fencing, crash history, and speed zones.¹⁰

Q: When are school-zone speed limits in effect?

A: School-zone speed limits are in effect whenever children are present, going to or leaving school, and during recess.¹¹



Q: How are school-zone speed limits identified for motorists?

A: A school-zone requires appropriate signs displaying the reduced speed limit and indicating the beginning and end of the reduced speed limit zone.¹²

Q: What is the speed limit in a school-zone?

A: Local authorities, including a county board, city council, or town board (but not a school district) may establish the speed limit in a school-zone, but cannot reduce the speed limit on a given road by more than 30 mph or set the speed limit at less than 15 mph.¹³

Example: A street where the speed limit is ordinarily 55 mph could have a speed limit of 25 mph in a school-zone, but no lower. A street where the speed limit is ordinarily 30 mph could not have a speed limit less than 15 mph.

Q: What is the fine for exceeding a school-zone speed limit?

A: The fine for violating the speed limit in a school-zone is double the ordinary fine for exceeding a speed limit unless the ordinary fine is less than \$25. Any ordinary speeding violation fine less than \$25 will have an additional \$25 added onto it in a school-zone rather than being doubled.¹⁴

Example: If the fine for violating a speed limit is ordinarily \$100, the fine for violating the speed limit in a school-zone would be \$200. If the fine for violating a speed limit is \$15, the fine for violating the speed limit in a school-zone would be \$40.

Q: How can a member of the community work to get the speed limit lowered and/or speeding fines increased in school-zones?

A: Community members are encouraged to work with their local government to change speed limits or increase fines. Start by identifying who is in charge

of a particular road.¹⁵ Then, work through the local process of changing the speed limit.

While school-zone speed limits are an important step to increasing the safety of students as they travel

to school, it is important to consider the limitations as well. Speed limits are only useful when they are enforced. If local authorities do not enforce posted speed limits, motorists may disobey them.

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Endnotes

- ¹ *Slowing Down Traffic*, NAT'L CTR. FOR SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL, http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/engineering/slowing_down_traffic.cfm (last visited Sept. 4, 2013).
- ² *Slowing Down Traffic*, NAT'L CTR. FOR SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL, http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/engineering/slowing_down_traffic.cfm (last visited Sept. 4, 2013).
- ³ *Slowing Down Traffic*, NAT'L CTR. FOR SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL, http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/engineering/slowing_down_traffic.cfm (last visited Sept. 4, 2013).
- ⁴ *Safe Routes To Schools Guide*, NAT'L CTR. FOR SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL (2011), 3-63, available at http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/pdf/SRTS-Guide_full.pdf.
- ⁵ Joon-Ki Kim, Sungyop Kim, Luis A. Porrello, and Gudmundur F. Ulfarsson, *Bicyclist Injury Severities in Bicycle-Motor Vehicle Accidents*, 39 ACCIDENT ANALYSIS & PREVENTION, 238 (2007).
- ⁶ MINN. STAT. § 169.14, subd. 5a(c).
- ⁷ MINN. STAT. §§ 169.14, subd. 5a(a), 169.011, subd. 38.
- ⁸ MINN. DEP'T OF TRANSP., MINNESOTA GUIDE TO ESTABLISHING SPEED LIMITS IN SCHOOL ZONES (2007).
- ⁹ MINN. STAT. § 169.14, subd. 5a(a).
- ¹⁰ *School Zone Speed Limits*, MINN. DEP'T OF TRANSP., OFFICE OF TRAFFIC ENGINEERING & ITS, available at <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/speed/pdf/schoolspeedlimits.pdf>.
- ¹¹ MINN. STAT. § 169.14, subd. 5a(a).
- ¹² MINN. STAT. § 169.14, subd. 5a(b).
- ¹³ MINN. STAT. § 169.14, subd. 5a(a).
- ¹⁴ MINN. STAT. § 169.14, subd. 5a(d).
- ¹⁵ See Public Health Law Center resources, available at <http://www.publichealthlawcenter.org>.