

## ***SPEED ZONES***

Speed Zones are often taken for granted and until a problem arises, most people pay little attention to the theory behind them. The following information will help you understand how speed zones are established and what they can and cannot do.

### ***SPEED ZONE MISCONCEPTIONS***

When speeding problems occur, concerned citizens frequently ask why we don't lower the speed limit. There are widely held misconceptions that speed limit signs will slow the speed of traffic, reduce accidents and increase safety. Most motorists drive at a speed that they consider to be comfortable for conditions. "Before and after" studies have shown that there are no significant changes in average vehicular speeds following the posting of new or revised speed limits. Furthermore, studies have found no direct relationship between posted speed limits and accident frequency.

### ***SPEED LAWS***

All fifty states base their speed regulations on the Basic Speed law that states, "No person shall drive a vehicle upon a highway at a speed greater than is reasonable or prudent having due regard for weather, visibility, the traffic on, and the surface and width of, the highway, and in no event at a speed that endangers the safety of persons or property."

Under California law, the maximum speed limit in urban areas is 65 MPH. All other speed limits are called *prima facie* limits, which "on the face of it" are considered by law to be safe and prudent under normal conditions. Certain *prima facie* limits are established by State Law and include the 25 MPH

speed limit in business and residential districts, 25 MPH in school zones when children are present, and 15 MPH speed limit in alleys, blind intersections and at blind railroad crossings.

Speed limits between 25 MPH and 65 MPH must be established on the basis of an Engineering and Traffic Survey. This survey includes an analysis of roadway conditions, accident records, and a sampling of the prevailing speed of traffic. A safe and reasonable speed limit is set at or below the speed at which 85% of the normal traffic is traveling.

### ***ENGINEERING AND TRAFFIC SURVEY***

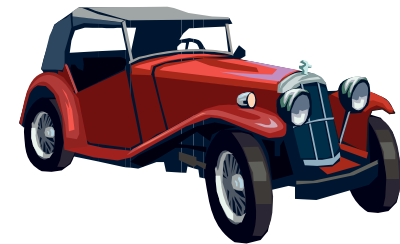
As defined in the California Vehicle Code, an engineering and traffic survey is a "survey of highway and traffic conditions in accordance with methods determined by the Department of Transportation (Caltrans) for use by state and local authorities." The survey shall include (but not be limited to) a consideration of the following:

- ***PREVAILING SPEEDS*** – Speeds are observed and recorded in an unbiased manner in order to determine the normal pace of free flowing traffic under normal conditions.
- ***ACCIDENT RECORDS*** – An analysis of past accident history pinpoints trouble spots and the probable contributing factors in speed related accidents. This process is crucial in the selection of effective countermeasures most likely to correct deficiencies and improve traffic regulations and control.

- ***HIGHWAY, TRAFFIC AND ROADSIDE CONDITIONS NOT READILY APPARENT*** – A visual inventory of existing roadside conditions, adjacent land use and pedestrian facilities that may affect the flow of traffic under normal conditions.

Traffic flowing at a uniform speed results in increased safety and fewer accidents. Drivers are less impatient, pass less often, and tailgate less, which reduces rear-end collisions.

The posting of an appropriate speed limit simplifies the job of enforcement for police officers, since a majority of the traffic voluntarily travels at the posted speed limit. Blatant speeders are easily spotted, safe drivers are not penalized, and police officers aren't asked to enforce unrealistic and arbitrary speed limits.





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