

Speed Limits in North Dakota



Speeding is the most common moving violation in North Dakota.

The reason for speed enforcement is for the safety of the motoring public, and to prevent injuries and fatalities on our roadways. Enforcing speed not only reduces the number of crashes, but may also reduce the severity of the crashes that do occur.

Why Speed Limits?

Generally speaking, traffic laws that reflect the behavior of the majority of drivers have been found to be successful, while laws that indiscriminately place limitations on a majority of drivers tend to encourage moving violations, lack the support of the general public, and do not produce needed changes in driving behavior. This is true of speed zoning.

According to the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE), speed zoning is based on several essential concepts firmly established within the American system of government and law:

1. Driving behavior is an extension of social attitude and the majority of drivers respond in a safe and reasonable manner as demonstrated by consistently favorable driving records;
2. The normally careful and competent actions of a reasonable person should be considered appropriate;
3. Laws are established for the protection of the public and the regulation of unreasonable behavior on the part of individuals; and
4. Laws cannot be effectively enforced without the consent and voluntary compliance of the public majority.

Common Misconceptions About Speed Limits

The public generally accepts the concepts that provide the basis for speed zoning. However, according to the ITE, during moments of heightened levels of emotion, the public will in most cases reject those principles and depend instead on more popular misconceptions such as:

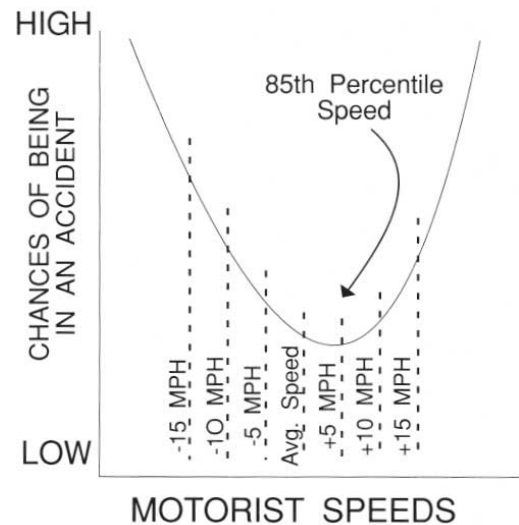
1. Reducing the speed limit will slow the speed of traffic;
2. Reducing speed limits will decrease the number of crashes and increase safety;
3. Raising the posted speed limit will cause an increase in the speed of traffic;
4. Any posted speed limit must be safer than an unposted speed limit; and
5. Drivers will always go 5 mph over the posted speed limit.





Intent of Speed Limits

The most widely accepted method by state and local agencies is to set the speed limit at or below the speed at which 85 percent of the traffic is moving. The 85th percentile speed is the speed not exceeded by 85 percent of drivers, based on radar checks. Studies have shown crash rates are lowest at around the 85th percentile speed. Drivers traveling significantly faster or slower than this speed are at a greater risk for being in a crash. It is the variation of speed in traffic that is related to crash risk, not just high speeds.



Source: National Motorists Association

How Are Speed Limits Established?

Speed limits are determined by state law. Prior to speed limits being set or changed, the North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT) conducts engineering studies to determine the 85th percentile speed of a road.

Other factors that may affect the establishment of speed limits include:

- Road characteristics, such as the condition of the road shoulder, road grade (i.e. steepness), road alignment (i.e. degree of curves), and driver sight distance
- The pace speed, which is the 10 mph range in which the majority of vehicles on a road are traveling
- The amount of development near/adjacent to the road
- Parking and pedestrian activity on/near the road
- Number of reported crashes on the road segment for at least one year

Who Changes Speed Limits?

Local Authorities: Local authorities in their respective jurisdictions can increase or decrease speed limits after engineering and traffic investigations are completed. This is commonly done by local authorities to:

- Decrease speed limits at intersections
- Increase speed limits in an urban area
- Decrease the speed limit outside an urban area

Any changes on state highways or extensions thereof in a municipality must be approved by NDDOT and Highway Patrol officials.

The Highway Patrol: NDDOT and Highway Patrol officials can change speed limits on segments of state highways after engineering and traffic investigations are completed.

How is a Speed Study Requested?

Citizens may contact a local government official such as a mayor, city council member, or law enforcement representative if they believe that a speed study should be conducted to increase or decrease the speed limit on a state highway. The local government official will then contact the NDDOT district engineer. The NDDOT district engineer will request a speed study be conducted by NDDOT engineering staff. The results of the engineering study will determine if a speed limit should be changed.



Standard Speed Limits in North Dakota

The speed limits are enforced at all times. However, in inclement weather, such as rain, snow and sleet, speed may be enforced at a lower speed than the posted speed limit. In the absence of posted speed limits, North Dakota state law designates the following speeds:

- 20 mph**— If your view is obstructed when approaching a railway, intersection, or highway and also when driving near a school during recess, opening hours, or closing hours.
- 25 mph**— In business districts, residential neighborhoods, and public parks.
- 55 mph**— On gravel, dirt, or loose surface roads and on paved two-lane county/township highways
- 65 mph**— On paved two-lane highways
- 70 mph**— On paved and divided multilane highways
- 75 mph**— On access-controlled, paved and divided, multilane interstate highways

How Do Speed Limits Affect Me?

Speed limits encourage safe driving, keep our roads usable, and help drivers act reasonably and with good judgment. Different limits may be made for different times of the day, different types of vehicles, and certain conditions. Drivers should be aware that Class A authorized emergency vehicles are exempt from speed limits during emergencies. It is a law in North Dakota for vehicles to stop or yield the right of way for authorized emergency vehicles. Safely slow down, pull over, and share the road with emergency vehicles.

Resources:

North Dakota Century Code. Motor Vehicles Section. <http://www.legis.nd.gov/cencode/t39.html>.

Speed Management Safety. FHWA resources website at <http://safety.fhwa.dor.gov.speedmgt/>.

Institute of Transportation Engineers. Speed Zoning Information. http://www.ite.org/standards/speed_zoning.pdf.

If you have additional questions about speed limits in North Dakota,
please contact:

North Dakota Department of Transportation
608 East Boulevard Avenue
Bismarck, ND 58505-0700
(701) 328-2500
dot@nd.gov

North Dakota State University does not discriminate on the basis of age, color, disability, gender expression/identity, genetic information, marital status, national origin, public assistance status, sex, sexual orientation, status as a U.S. veteran, race or religion. Direct inquiries to the Vice President for Equity, Diversity and Global Outreach, 205 Old Main, (701)231-7708.