

Legislative Council Select Committee Rural Road Speed Limits

Submission by Barry McDonald

I am a Collision Reconstructionist. For many years I investigated fatal and serious collisions for the Police Department. I have attended many courses on collisions including courses related to human behaviour. Because of my experience of seeing many cases of road trauma and the effect it has on victim's relatives and friends I am a very strong advocate of road safety.

What is, or should be, the reason for speed limits on our roads. A speed limit should be such that it allows people to travel from point A to Point B, for business, pleasure or recreation, safely and in a reasonable time.

A balance needs to be achieved in setting reasonable speed limits. Limits can extend from open speed limits to the original restriction of a pedestrian walking and waving a red flag in front of the car as a warning. Both of these are extremes. Open speed limits would lead to many fatal accidents and a community "gun ho" attitude. The pedestrian with the flag at the other extreme requires no further comment. What is a reasonable speed?

The three relevant speed limits are 100K/mh, 90K/mh and 80K/mh. What are the positives and negatives of these three speeds.

Put yourself into a position where you are driving through a school zone at 40K/mh. Because of the imminent risks around you, you are very alert and ready to react to any danger that may appear. If you put yourself on the Midland Highway on the section between Epping Forest Roadhouse and Symons Plains and you were confronted with a similar 40 K/mh speed limit how would you react.

That section of road is 14 kilometres long and apart from a slight "S" bend in the middle is a straight road. If you were confronted with that

signage you would likely either ignore it or become very complacent whilst travelling it. If you travelled it at 40 K/mh you would be likely not to concentrate on your driving and think of other things. Things like what you have to do later in the day, phoning or texting a friend, or just going off into a “dream world”. Is your driving at 40K/mh in such conditions safer than driving at 110 K/mh when more of your attention is to the present task of driving? NO.

Closing speeds

At 100 K/mh in a head on collision there is a closing speed of 200 K/mh. At 80 K/mh in a head on collision there is a closing speed of 160 K/mh. I would not like to be in either collision and the likelihood of fatal or serious injuries in either is great.

Reaction time

The driver of a vehicle travelling at 80K/mh has only less than 9 metres extra time to react to a perceived dangerous situation than a driver travelling at 100 K/mh. Given that at a lower speed the driver is less likely to be attentive, the difference in speed is irrelevant or even in favour of the higher more attentive speed.

Consider the section of the Lyell Highway between Tarraleah and Queenstown. There are several section of this road where 100 K/mh would be an appropriate and safe speed. There are several other sections where a much lower speed is appropriate. The 33 bends between Gormanston and Queenstown would be safely travelled about 30 to 40 K/mh. If the overall speed limit was reduced, motorists are either going to ignore it or become frustrated and travel at dangerous speed on the more windy sections.

Public perception of a reduced speed.

If the speed limit is reduced it will have to be enforced by police booking motorists for exceeding the speed limit. This is going to

create a perception, rightly or wrongly, in the public's mind of "revenue raising". An unpopular law that has no rational reason will put the public offside with police and legislators.

When you travel the Northern part of the Midland Highway in a 120K/mh zone you come to Cleveland and are reduced to 80 K/mh. This is warranted because it is a built up area. However motorists would become frustrated with a lowered speed limit where you hardly ever see any people. This is the sort of frustration that would occur if there was a blanket 90K/mh or 80K/mh speed limit on all country roads.

A blanket reduction in speed on all country roads would likely have the opposite effect to what would be intended and there would be an increase in accidents. This would likely result in an increase in injuries and fatalities.

I would suggest greater use of the advisory speed limit signs on sections of road that are windy or otherwise dangerous.

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