



How are speed limits established?

Colorado State Law establishes speed limits for all roadways in Colorado relating to land uses along the roadway, such as residential, business, etc. Further, it requires that changes from those base limits be set following the procedures and standards in the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices, a manual produced by the FHWA for use throughout the US. Those procedures include an engineering study of the roadway conditions, accidents and traffic flow speeds under normal conditions. The studies determine the prevailing speed of prudent drivers (often referred to as the “85th percentile speed”).

The basic premise is that the actions of a normally careful and competent person should be considered legal, and that most drivers are reasonable people who will drive carefully and at a speed which is suitable for the existing conditions.

Existing posted speed limits have been established previously by State and local entities based on these requirements. However, new developments or changing conditions along the roadway may make the posted speed limit outdated. An engineering study based on the MUTCD is conducted to review or change these speed limits.

A speed survey may be requested by calling Douglas County Traffic Engineering (see back of brochure for contact information.)



Misconceptions

It is a popular misconception that changing the speed limit will automatically slow or raise the speed of traffic. However, “before and after” speed studies show that there is no significant change in vehicle speed after speed limits are changed.

Accident studies also do not typically show any significant change in accident rates after speed limits are increased or decreased.

Engineering studies have shown that most people drive as they perceive a roadway and weather conditions and will ignore a posted speed limit if it is perceived as too low or too high. A realistic speed limit is voluntarily obeyed by the majority of drivers.

An unrealistic speed limit that is “too low” will:

- Make the behavior of reasonable and prudent drivers unlawful
- If enforced, cause antagonism towards enforcement personnel and traffic laws, in general
- Create a negative image of the community for visitors and tourists
- Result in dangerous speed differentials in the traffic flow

Realistic Speed Limits

An appropriate speed limit will result in the maximum number of vehicles traveling at about the same speed. This will result in fewer drivers following too close or tailgating, excessive weaving, and rapid accelerating and slowing, all which contribute to high accident rates. A speed limit based upon the actual roadway conditions, as required by State Law, will result in a safer roadway.



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TRAFFIC ENGINEERING

ESTABLISHING SPEED LIMITS

Information provided by:
Douglas County Traffic Engineering

If you would like more information, please
contact:

Traffic Engineering (303) 660-7490
traffic@douglas.co.us

Please feel free to visit our website at:

<http://www.douglas.co.us/road-work/traffic/>

Douglas County has jurisdiction over unincorporated area
of the County (including Highlands Ranch). Contact towns
or cities regarding issues within their respective
boundaries.

Douglas County Traffic Engineering
100 Third Street
Castle Rock, CO 80104

An Informational Brochure
Provided by
Douglas County Traffic
Engineering