

America Walks' Position Statement:

SPEED: A NATIONAL PEDESTRIAN SAFETY ISSUE

Motor vehicle speed is a major safety issue for motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians.

Traffic collisions remain the leading cause of injury-related death for Americans aged 4 to 33. Speeding drivers are a factor in 30 percent of fatal traffic collisions nationwide.

Just a modest decrease in motor vehicle speed can mean a dramatic increase in survival rates in pedestrian-vehicle crashes. For pedestrians, even drivers traveling beneath the legal speed limit can present a lethal threat. If a pedestrian is hit by a vehicle that is traveling 20 mph, the pedestrian survival rate is 95 percent. This drops to 60 percent at 30 mph, and just 20 percent at 40 mph.

Research shows that wide, straight roads and long sight distance encourage higher travel speeds and therefore lead to increased fatalities and injuries. Yet traffic engineering models tend to favor fast-moving roadways over slower ones. For example, the primary metric of a roadway's performance is its Level of Service (LOS), a measure of how free-flowing traffic moves. Faster and wider roads typically receive a high LOS rating – until they become bogged down with traffic – though these are precisely the elements that degrade roadway performance from a pedestrian perspective.

85th Percentile Rule

Another example of this speed-biased traffic engineering is the 85th Percentile Rule. In many jurisdictions, engineers set speed limits by determining the speed at which 85 percent of drivers travel. Engineers assume that these drivers are traveling at appropriate speeds given the road design, while 15 percent of drivers will travel at unsafe speeds. Predictably, the 85 percent of "average" drivers respond by exceeding the posted speed limit.

America Walks' Position on Travel Speed:

America Walks challenges the nation to design and redesign roadways and urban thoroughfares for the following travel speeds:

- Less than 20 mph in residential areas.
- Less than 30 mph on connector streets and major urban thoroughfares.

Objectives:

- Improve street design to discourage speeding traffic and enhance the pedestrian environment.
- Revise LOS standards to consider how a street performs for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Abandon the 85th percentile rule and design roads for the desired speed limit (*see reverse*).
- Increase enforcement of speeding and other laws.

To meet these objectives, America Walks will:

- Press ITE, AASHTO and other professional organizations to revise engineering standards to discourage speeding traffic.
- Urge Congress to increase funding for traffic calming.
- Increase public awareness about the dangers of speeding traffic.

What You Can Do Locally:

- Launch a local media campaign on speeding.
- Conduct a walking audit of your community.
- Urge local officials to implement traffic calming.
- Press law enforcement to ticket speeders.

Designing for Safe Streets

Narrower streets, street trees and mature tree canopy, on-street parking, buildings located close to the sidewalk, raised crosswalks, and reducing the number and width of lanes can reduce traffic speeds, and thus reduce crash rates and traffic fatalities. To improve the pedestrian environment, many cities have embraced these design principles.

The City of Davis, California has restricted thoroughfares to no more than four lanes. Greater vehicle access is provided by a tight network of through streets, rather than a single, major arterial road. In Olympia, Washington, policymakers have proposed a new narrower standard for lane widths based on a roadway's target speed.

Shorter block lengths and tighter curb radii – not exceeding 10 feet in urban and suburban areas or 25 feet on bus and truck routes – and other design elements force motorists to lower their travel speed and drive more cautiously. Bicycle lanes, street trees and other landscaping can deter speeding.

A wide range of programs for improving the pedestrian environment have been developed during the past decade by the federal government and by communities in collaboration with professional traffic engineering and land use planning organizations. Programs include traffic calming, Safe Routes to Schools, Context Sensitive Solutions, and Non-Motorized Transportation Pilot Program.

Yet these programs represent only a fraction of the billions spent on the nation's transportation system annually. A higher level of financial commitment from all levels of government is needed to improve pedestrian safety.

For more information, visit www.americawalks.org.