

Introduction

Good afternoon, my name is Emily Van Kesteren and today I am representing the local tri-county Active & Safe Routes to School committee.

The mission of ASRTS is to work in partnerships for the improvement of children's health, safety and our environment through comprehensive health promotion strategies such as engagement, education, research, and policy development.

Background

ASRTS provided written input for this policy back in March 2015, which included our own data from School Travel Planning surveys that identify traffic and traffic speed as top concerns among both parents and youth, preventing the use of active school travel.

Reducing the speed of traffic around schools is important to address both:

- 1) Perceived barriers, and
- 2) Objective dangers; where the faster a vehicle collides with a pedestrian, the greater risk of injury and fatalities.

A policy such as this, that addresses traffic speed in school zones, has incredible potential to remove a top barrier for active school travel, through a wider-reaching approach.

Feedback

To begin, I would like to thank you on behalf of ASRTS for prioritizing the safety of children on their journey to and from school and for providing opportunities, both written and now verbal, to provide input on this very important policy decision.

It is clear from the Background Considerations document that there is no single School Zone Speed Limit Option that will be a win-win-win; as there are pro's and con's to every option. Realizing this, we would like to provide the following comments on the current policy recommendation for your consideration.

Literature Review

This winter, a colleague and I conducted a literature review to determine what interventions have been successful at reducing traffic speeds in schools zones. The results of this review found that the most effective interventions for reducing traffic speeds are physical traffic calming devices and reduced speed limits WHEN paired with physical traffic calming devices. We found our results to be consistent with the City's Traffic Calming Policy for Existing Neighbourhoods where it states that "people travel at a speed they feel comfortable based on the environment through which they are driving, regardless of the posted speed limit." This may lead to pedestrians perceiving the roadway to be safer due to the reduced speed limit; **leading to a false sense of security.**

- 1) **Reducing speed limits can lead to a false sense of security**

- The staff report identifies "that artificially reducing the speed limit has variable to no impact to the actual operating speed" and that "a large speed differential between the posted and actual speed can make it difficult for pedestrians to safely judge crossing opportunities, which can result in a less safe pedestrian environment."
- In school zones, this becomes even more dangerous as children can struggle to decipher the speed and distance of an approaching vehicle because their optical sensitivity to looming objects has not yet matured (Wann, Poulter, & Purcell, 2011).
- The false sense of security from only reducing speed limits could increase risk rather than achieving the intended goal of increasing pedestrian safety

2) The use of the 3 E's

- We greatly appreciate the attempt to include all 3 E's – engineering, education, and enforcement – in your approach to this policy, as it is known, and stated in the background document "that reducing speed limits and installing signs will not change driver behaviour and will not reduce the speed of vehicles". Evidence shows that using interventions through a variety of approaches will allow for the greatest impact and rate of success.

3) Engineering and Education – With that, there are a few points I would like to make re: the engineering and education components...

Education:

- The third component of the draft policy refers to a public education campaign and multi-faceted communication plan in partnership with London Police and school boards.
- The report identifies a possible implementation period of two years for the speed limit signs. To have a campaign that effectively educates the public, it's important to consider the length and intensity of the campaign in relation to the topic at hand. If a campaign is done at the beginning of a two year period, people may lose the message once it's implemented in their neighbourhood.
- Another consideration for the education campaign is over saturation of messaging. Ongoing and upcoming campaigns that are locally being conducted include Pedestrian Crossovers, red light cameras, annual winter driving campaign, distracted driving and share the road. If City Police and school boards take on the responsibility of education, we would recommend coordinating with the London Middlesex Road Safety Committee who currently undertakes a lot of these initiatives.

Engineering:

- Regarding engineering, the second component of the policy states that "The Traffic Calming Policy is to be applied where appropriate and in retrofit situations."
- Our concern with this approach is that while the Traffic Calming Policy is a FANTASTIC document that provides consistency and equality in determining whether traffic calming is warranted, it is a formal process consisting of many stages, which may lead a lot of school zones being susceptible to a higher level of risk related to the false sense of security that speed limit reductions can lead to.

- While your committee has strayed away from the 40km/h School Zones with flashing beacons, and we too, like the 24/7 application that reduced speed limits offer; having times with beacons does however have a greater effectiveness of reducing traffic speed. Perhaps a consideration could be made to implement a similar type of device or expedite the traffic calming process for schools where a concern of traffic speed has already been identified.

4) 150m buffer

- Lastly, we like that there is room for adjustment on the Ontario Traffic Manual's 150 metre school zone, as a lot of the speeding concerns we see at School Travel Planning schools are not in front of the school, but rather, on adjacent roads. Many schools actually experience complete grid-locks before and after school, but it's on the roads leading to, and surrounding schools, that are experiencing the greatest speeding issues.

Closing Remarks

In closing, while we understand there is no perfect solution, we ask that you strongly consider the con of "reduced effectiveness" when looking at the "City-wide Reduction of 50km/h to 40km/h". To have a true impact on increasing children's safety, it's imperative that we not simply "reduce speed limits" but "reduce speeds".

Thank you