



Island County Public Works

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RE: Request to Change the Speed Limit on Island County Roads

When changing the speed limit, we are in effect changing a law. To this end, the process is not taken lightly and can be quite a lengthy one, often taking a year or more. The main factor in determining the speed limit is what speed the majority of the public is traveling. This is referred to as the 85th percentile speed. The speed limit usually reflects this number. An article from the Institute of Transportation Engineers containing further information on speed zoning can be found on the web page.

If a group or individual wishes to pursue a speed limit change, they fill out a petition, can also be found on the web page. This petition should include the location where they wish for the speed change to take place, the proposed speed limit, and signatures of the adjacent property owners on the segment of road requested for the change. At this time, these property owners can express their views. Completed petitions are mailed to the Board of County Commissioners and then referred to the Traffic Engineer for review and comments.

The Traffic Engineer will review the petition and the road segment in question. Our goal in Island County is to set our speed limits at a speed that is safe and efficient, meaning a speed that is safe for the general public and still moves traffic efficiently. We rely on national engineering standards to determine what the safe and efficient speed is. Island County follows the "Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD)" in establishing speed zones. The main factor in determining the speed limit is the speed which the majority of the motorists are traveling. Speed studies are completed of vehicles traveling on the section of road in question, the data is collected and evaluated; determining the 85th percentile driving speed, as this follows the driver's perception of safe speed and the recommendation of the MUTCD and the Institute of Transportation Engineers.

The Traffic Engineer evaluates all available information to determine if a change in the speed limit is warranted. If it is determined that a speed limit modification is necessary, a resolution is prepared, providing the legal terms of exact location where the speed zone would apply and the revised speed limit. This resolution is then presented to the Island County Commissioners for a public hearing. At this hearing, the general public has the opportunity to agree or disagree with the proposed speed limit change. The resolution then goes before the Board of Island County Commissioners for a vote. After approval, speed limit signs reflecting the new speed zone are posted.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact the Traffic Engineer at (360) 678 – 7953.