

*Speed Management Workshops*

**RESTORING CREDIBILITY  
TO SPEED SETTING:  
ENGINEERING,  
ENFORCEMENT, &  
EDUCATIONAL  
ISSUES**

Report  
WORKSHOPS  
REPORTS

Washington, D.C. / January 2000  
Dallas, Texas / March 2000

Federal Highway Administration  
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration



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# **SPEED MANAGEMENT WORKSHOPS - 2000**

*Speeding – exceeding the posted limits or driving too fast for conditions – is a problem on all U.S. roads.*

Most highways and motor vehicles in the United States are designed and built to operate safely at speeds traveled by most motorists, but speeding is a factor in as many as one-third of all fatal crashes nationwide. In addition to the human toll of speeding-related fatalities, the cost to society for speeding-related injuries was estimated to be \$27 billion in 1994. Speeding is also a factor in aggressive driving incidents.

The U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) regards speeding as a significant threat to public safety and to the Nation's mobility and productivity. Speeding is, however, a complex problem that involves public attitude, personal behavior, vehicle performance, roadway characteristics, enforcement strategies, court sanctions and speed zoning. To address this multifaceted issue, the U.S. DOT created the Speed Management Team, a multiagency task force representing the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). The Speed Management Team's mission is to reduce the number of speeding-related fatalities and injuries on the Nation's roadways.

The Team's strategy to meet this mission is a holistic approach that encompasses enforcement, public information and education, traffic engineering, and behavioral efforts in the management, operations, and research arenas. This approach acknowledges the need to involve a broad range of transportation partners if the problem of speeding is to be solved.

## **Speed Management Workshops**

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As part of this approach to addressing the problem of speeding, the U.S. DOT Speed Management Team joined with the Intelligent Transportation Society of America to sponsor two Speed Management Workshops - *Restoring Credibility to Speed Setting: Engineering, Enforcement, and Educational Issues*. The first was held in January 2000, in conjunction with the Transportation Research Board's (TRB's) annual meeting in Washington, DC. The second workshop was held in March 2000, in Dallas, TX. These workshops provided ideal platforms for researchers and practitioners to discuss speed-setting and enforcement issues.

The workshops' programs built on TRB's *Special Report 254, Managing Speed: Review of Current Practice for Setting and Enforcing Speed Limits*. The report represents the findings of a 17-member multidisciplinary committee that reviewed criteria used to establish and enforce speed limits in the United States. The objective of the workshops was to identify actions needed to restore the credibility of speed limits across the Nation. Workshop participants addressed:

- Methodologies used for setting realistic speed limits
- Public perception and acceptance of speed limits and enforcement efforts
- Existing and new speed-setting and enforcement technologies
- Engineering and operations concerns
- Judicial considerations
- Lessons learned through domestic and foreign experiences in speed management

## **Plenary Sessions**

The workshops featured plenary sessions followed by breakout groups designed to explore the various facets of the speeding problem. Speakers in each plenary session addressed the four factors affecting speed management:

- Public Policy and Political Issues
- Engineering Issues
- Enforcement Issues
- Judicial Issues

## **Breakout Sessions**

At the conclusion of the plenary sessions, workshop participants were assigned to concurrent breakout sessions. These breakout sessions were specifically designed to bring together individuals representing a cross section of engineering, law enforcement, and planning interests. Their charge was to “create the product” of the meetings by identifying future actions that restore the credibility of speed limits. Issues connected with both static (posted signs with unchanging speed limits) and variable speed limits (limits that change according to the traffic and weather conditions) were considered.

During each session, members focused on the issues of engineering, enforcement, judicial, and public policy and political aspects of speed management. Although each breakout session identified its own issues, the groups noted common themes – crosscutting issues – to be addressed if the problem of speeding is to be managed successfully. These themes identified the need to:

- Overcome institutional and jurisdictional barriers to consistent speed limits and enforcement practices.
- Coordinate more closely with stakeholders across organizational and jurisdictional concerns to improve support for consistent speed management.
- Improve communication and education between the transportation disciplines and the public to reinforce the importance of setting and enforcing safe speed limits.

## Results

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Results from the breakout sessions of both workshops were synthesized, and are summarized below into the four factors of Engineering, Enforcement, Judicial, and Political and Public Policy.

### *Engineering Issues*

Participants at the workshops concurred on the need to improve cooperation between engineering and law enforcement personnel to set realistic, enforceable speed limits that are appropriate to roadway design. Participants felt that it was important to review, evaluate, and update speed limits periodically to accommodate changing demographics and increasing urbanization of previously rural areas. Workshop participants also identified the need for more “corridor coordination” – collaboration among neighboring jurisdictions to ensure seamless speed-setting procedures, such as consistent speed limits and geometry.

Other engineering issues addressed in the breakout sessions included:

- Designing roadways with adequate infrastructure to accommodate law enforcement operations (space for safely observing and stopping vehicles).
- Monitoring speeds on roadways more effectively and studying the effect of speed limit changes.
- Establishing speed zones where speed is a safety problem.
- Incorporating new technologies to alert drivers to safety problems.
- Developing standards for implementing variable speed limits (VSLs), which are important and credible when applied consistently.
- Linking VSLs to road conditions. They are particularly useful for increasing safety in bad weather and for relieving congestion.
- Increasing public education about the meaning and use of enforcement in construction work zones.

### *Enforcement Issues*

Workshop participants at both sessions raised the issue of credibility in enforcing reasonable speed limits. They also noted the crucial need for automated enforcement technology such as electronic citation, which would enable officers to track driver-behavior patterns, identify repeat offenders, and update files from the road or crash site. Using automated enforcement technology raises issues of privacy, but participants felt that these could be overcome through better institutional cooperation among the transportation partners. Both sessions identified the importance of consistent and uniform enforcement of speed limits nationwide.

Other enforcement issues addressed in the breakout sessions included:

- Reinforcing the quality, consistency, and accountability of speed limit enforcement so that drivers know that the limits are the law. This will enhance driver expectations of enforcement for violating realistic speed limits.
- Improving cooperation and communication so that law enforcement officials are part of the decision-making process to change speed limits.
- Appropriating sufficient resources - personnel and technology - to speed limit enforcement. Photoradar enforcement only provides a "snapshot" of driver behavior and should be combined with traditional enforcement activities to change the way that the public and police view speeding.
- Establishing reciprocity between jurisdictions. Information on driving under the influence charges is exchanged, but not information about speeding citations.
- Basing enforcement on what contributes to crashes - engineering and enforcement personnel must cooperate and work together.
- Identifying safety as paramount rationale for enforcement. Fines should be commensurate with violation, not used as funding source for community governments.
- Establishing incentives for obeying speed limits, including higher fines and points for repeat offenders and insurance discounts for good drivers.
- Using technology - automated enforcement, changeable message signs, and VSL - to keep drivers better informed about road conditions and incidents.
- Having all partners work together to educate public about speed limit rationale.

### ***Judicial Issues***

Improving cooperation between agencies and disciplines was raised as a critical issue. Participants also discussed the need for uniform consequences for reasonable enforcement of realistic speed limits, and increasing involvement and education among the agencies involved in establishing, enforcing, and adjudicating problems of speeding.

Other judicial issues addressed in the breakout sessions included:

- Improving communication and training of prosecutors and judiciary about hazards associated with speeding.
- Reducing public tolerance for speeding through aggressive enforcement and adjudication of reasonable speed limits.
- Informing courts about where and why speed limits are updated to make them more conversant on the issues.
- Entering adjudications in a Statewide system to manage and track cases so that courts have technology to recognize repeat offenders.
- Educating judicial members about the role and benefits of automated enforcement and its potential benefits on judicial calendars.
- Encouraging consistent and fair punishment for speeding violations – mandatory minimum and discretionary maximum sentences.
- Seeking input from judicial officials on what they expect with regard to speed limits and tolerances.

### ***Political and Public Policy Issues***

Education and cooperation were paramount concerns to workshop participants. The view most often voiced was the need for ongoing communication to educate politicians and policy makers about the rational setting, enforcing, and adjudicating of realistic speed limits.

Other political and public policy issues addressed in the breakout sessions included:

- Involving political officials in the process of setting speed limits.
- Encouraging “ownership” of highways and highway safety among all parties to reach the goal of safety and mobility.
- Educating legislators on the benefits and uses of enforcement technologies – how they work and how they will be used.
- Encouraging equal and consistent application of speed limits, enforcement, and adjudication across all States.
- Learning from Stop Red-Light-Running and Mothers Against Drunk Driving campaigns that education can help legislators leverage speeding to a safety issue upon which they can act.
- Establishing and using reciprocity agreements among jurisdictions.
- Changing speed laws from basic to absolute (basic law allows courts to consider compelling circumstances; absolute laws allow States to adhere to fixed speed limits).
- Examining political ramifications of strictly observing the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile method for speed limit determination.
- Organizing to raise public awareness of speeding and driving safely to help establish realistic goals and support coordination.
- Phasing in VSLs and automated enforcement programs in areas that will generate public support by reducing risks to an identifiable population segment such as schools and construction work zones.
- Educating the public, politicians, and policy makers about how aggressive enforcement improves traffic safety and quality of life.

## **Conclusions**

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The results of the Speed Management Workshops emphasize the need for enhanced communication and cooperation among the engineering, enforcement, judicial, and political partners who directly affect safety on the Nation's roads. The moderator for the Dallas workshop noted that "it is hard to fight the value of cooperation." The spirit of cooperation resulting from these Speed Management Workshops also underscores the need for concerted educational efforts among the partners and the need for consistent, effective public outreach programs to support safety decisions.

As a result of the workshops and the participants' responses to the four issues addressed, the U.S. DOT Speed Management Team is working with State and regional organizations and agencies to support local sponsorship of these types of public awareness workshops.

## **Contacts**

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### **U.S. DOT SPEED MANAGEMENT TEAM**

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At the time of the workshops, Suzanne Stack was the FHWA Co-Team Leader.