

# Speed Limits Overview

## Purpose and Authority

- Speed limits are established to promote safe, efficient, and uniform traffic flow.
- Municipal governments set speed limits under state laws and MUTCD guidelines.

## Key Principles

- Speed limits should reflect:
  - Reasonable driver behavior
  - Roadway conditions
  - Safety for all users (vehicles, pedestrians, cyclists)

## Engineering Study Requirement

- MUTCD requires an engineering study before changing or establishing a speed limit.
- Study includes:
  - 85th Percentile Speed: Speed at or below which 85% of drivers travel under free-flow conditions.
  - Crash History: Review of accident data for the segment.
  - Roadway Characteristics: Lane width, curves, sight distance, roadside development.
  - Traffic Volume and Composition: Cars, trucks, pedestrians, bicycles.
  - Environmental Factors: Schools, parks, residential areas.

## Recommended Speed Limit Setting

- Base Speed: Typically, near the 85th percentile speed of traffic using the roadway for a period of study time.
- Adjustments:
  - Lowering for high pedestrian activity, schools, or crash-prone areas.
  - Raising only if roadway design and safety support it.
  - MUTCD discourages arbitrary or overly restrictive limits.
  - All determinations must be reasonable and justifications must be articulated and memorialized.

## Legal and Public Process

- Municipal ordinance or resolution required.
- Public input may be sought for transparency.
- Signage must comply with MUTCD standards for size, placement, and visibility.

## Documentation

- Engineering study and justification must be retained on file.
- Include:
  - Data sources
  - Analysis methodology
  - Final recommendation and rationale

## Periodic Review

- Speed limits should be re-evaluated periodically or after major roadway changes.

## Speed Limits in Kansas

- 1. Protect public safety with “reasonable and prudent” speeds.**

Kansas’ basic speed law requires drivers to travel at speeds that are *reasonable and prudent under the conditions* and with regard to actual and potential hazards (e.g., weather, traffic, sight distance). This principle is the basis for why speed limits exist: to prevent crashes and reduce the severity of those that do occur.

**Sources:** K.S.A. 8-1558 (Basic rule and maximum speed limits); MUTCD (general purpose of regulatory speed limits and safety intent).
- 2. Promote uniformity and predictability for drivers across jurisdictions.**

Consistent, well-posted speed limits help drivers anticipate appropriate speeds as they move from state routes to city streets (e.g., in Bel Aire, Derby, Wichita,). The MUTCD emphasizes uniform application of regulatory signs so drivers can rely on consistent rules, which supports compliance and efficient traffic flow.

**Sources:** K.S.A. 8-1559 (authority to set and post speed limits). MUTCD (Principles for regulatory signs, including Speed Limit sign R2-1)
- 3. Match speed limits to roadway context through engineering and traffic investigation.**

Kansas law authorizes the Secretary of Transportation (for state highways) and local authorities (cities/counties) to establish or alter speed limits **after an engineering and traffic investigation**, ensuring limits reflect prevailing speeds, roadway design, crash history, pedestrian/bicycle activity, and roadside development. The new methodology allows for a traffic study or engineering judgement to be used in determining speed zones.

**Sources:** K.S.A. 8-1559 (engineering and traffic investigation; posting requirements); MUTCD (engineering study basis for speed zoning).
- 4. Enhance safety in special environments (schools and work zones).**

Lower, context-specific limits are used to protect vulnerable users (students, road workers) where the risk level is elevated. The MUTCD provides detailed guidance.

**Sources:** K.S.A. 8-1558 (framework for maximum limits and authority to modify limits with proper posting). MUTCD 2025 (Part 7 School Areas; Part 6 Work Zones)
- 5. Support enforceability and efficient mobility.**

Properly set and signed speed limits provide a clear legal standard for enforcement and help balance safety with reasonable travel times, minimizing speed variability that can lead to crashes.

**Sources:** K.S.A. 8-1558, 8-1559 (legal framework for maximum limits and local/state authority). MUTCD (regulatory sign function and uniformity)

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### Notes for cities & municipalities)

- Cities typically adopt speed limits by **ordinance** following an engineering study, then post **MUTCD-compliant signs**. The intent is to keep speeds aligned with roadway design and actual user behavior to reduce crash risk while preserving mobility.
- Sources:** K.S.A. 8-1559 (local authority process and posting); MUTCD (signing standards and engineering study principles).