

Attachment 3. Engineering and Regulatory Framework

There are two main types of speed limits in California: maximum speed limits and prima facie speed limits. The maximum limits apply everywhere. They are 65 miles per hour (mph) (or 70 mph if posted) for larger highways and 55 for smaller two-lane roads. The prima facie speed limits are set for other roads and range from 15 to 60 mph. The law sets forth a default prima facie limit (statutory speed limit) of 15 mph for an uncontrolled railroad crossing, approaching an uncontrolled intersection without a clear and unobstructed view, and any alley as well as a default prima facie limit of 25 mph for business and residential districts, school zones and senior zones. Often, these speeds are not reasonable for the prevailing conditions, so jurisdictions are allowed to modify them.

An Engineering and Traffic Study is a required in compliance with CVC 40802 to reevaluate non-statutory speed limits on segments of roadways that have undergone significant changes since the last review, such as the addition or elimination of parking or driveways, changes in the number of travel lanes, changes in the configuration of bicycle lanes, changes in traffic control signal coordination, or significant changes in traffic volumes. If there are no significant changes the speed limit surveys can be completed up to fourteen years from the date of the last survey.

Per CVC 22357, when a local authority determines upon the basis of an engineering and traffic survey that a speed greater than 25 miles per hour would facilitate movement of vehicular traffic and would be reasonable and safe, then the local authority may, by ordinance, determine and declare a different prima facie speed limit. The speed limit can be 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, 55, or 60 miles per hour or a maximum speed limit of 65 miles per hour, depending on what the engineering analysis has determined to be most appropriate to facilitate the orderly movement of traffic and is reasonable and safe. The declared prima facie or maximum speed limit is in effect when appropriate signs giving notice of the speed limit are erected on the street.

The engineering and traffic survey includes an analysis of the prevailing speed of free-flowing vehicles (the speed which 85% of motorists drive at or below on that particular segment, also known as the 85th percentile speed) and considers accident history, traffic and roadside conditions not readily apparent to the driver, and also the safety of bicyclists and pedestrians, with increased consideration for vulnerable pedestrian groups including children, seniors, persons with disabilities, users of personal assistive mobility devices, and the unhoused. In accordance with CVC 22358.6. (a) The Department of Transportation has revised the California Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices to require the Department of Transportation or a local authority to round speed limits to the nearest five miles per hour of the 85th percentile of the free-flowing traffic. However, based upon the considerations noted above and in compliance with CVC Sections 627 and 22358.5, The California Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices allows the posted speed limit to be reduced by 5 mph.

In summary, we adjust to the nearest 5 mph increment from the 85th percentile speed (i.e., if the 85th percentile is 36 or 37 mph, we round to nearest 5 mph or 35 mph), then based upon the other considerations and engineering judgement we can take an additional 5 mph speed reduction (i.e., from 35 mph to 30 mph).

The Town regularly updates all engineering and traffic surveys to be compliant with State law. The current 256-page Engineering and Traffic Survey Update is on file in the Parks and Public Works and Police Departments.