



Lone Star Goes 80!

by Greg Mauz, Texas Activist

While the nation's police agencies engaged in their "Click It or Ticket" campaign over the Memorial Day weekend, a miracle happened in Texas. The state's Department of Transportation (DOT) posted new 80-mph speed limit signs along over 500 miles of West Texas interstates. Limits increased from 75 to 80 mph on the 432-mile stretch of I-10 between Kerrville and El Paso. And, the new limit also graces the western most 89-miles of I-20, which merges into I-10, en route to El Paso. The Lone Star State now contains the nation's highest speed limit!

In predictable fashion, the so-called "safety advocates" (read: profiteers of speed enforcement) parroted their usual, many-times-refuted arguments. "People will now 'push 90 mph' and there will be a large increase in deaths."

The Martin Parker Report (Federal Highway Administration, 1997) analyzed 100 sites where speed limits were changed.

Whether limits went up or down,

travel speeds remained the same (+/- 1.5 mph). However, where speed limits were reduced, crashes increased. When limits went up, crashes went down! In reality, underposted speed limits cause crashes by causing increased speed conflicts between vehicles.

Thanks to the National Motorists Association, the Texas Legislature unanimously voted for 80 mph last year. The postings were delayed to study the safety aspects. DOT data recorded 92 fatalities on the affected stretches of I-10 and I-20, from 1999-2001, when speed limits were 70 mph. After raising limits to 75 mph, the deaths dropped 13 percent to 80, from 2002-2004.

The Texas DOT logged 85th percentile speeds of 79 mph. Federal Law (*Manual On Uniform Traffic Control Devices*, MUTCD, Section 2B.11) recommends a speed limit be set at "the 85th percentile of free flowing traffic..." The 85th percentile is the most democratic and safest speed. ■

Higher speed limits mean safer roadways

Editor:

While the nation's police agencies engaged in their "Click It or Ticket" campaign over the Memorial Day weekend, a miracle of sorts happened in Texas.

The state's transportation department posted new 80-mph speed limit signs along more than 500 miles of West Texas interstates.

Limits increased from 75 to 80 mph along the 432-mile stretch of Interstate 10 between Kerrville and El Paso. The new limit also graces the western most 89 miles of Interstate 20, which merges with I-10 en route to El Paso.

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In predictable fashion, the so-called "safety advocates" parroted their usual, many times refuted, arguments.

People will now push 90 mph and there will be a large increase in deaths. A 1997 report for the Federal Highway Administration analyzed 100 sites where speed limits were changed.

Whether limits went up or down, travel speeds remained the same, plus or minus 1.5 mph.

However, where speeds were reduced, crashes increased. When limits went up, crashes went down.

In reality, underposted speed limits cause crashes by increasing speed variance between vehicles, encouraging left lane bandits, tailgaters and lane surfers, plus denying enough yellow time at traffic signals.

Thanks to the National Motorists Association, the Legislature voted last year to increase the speed limit to 80. The posting was delayed to study the safety aspects.

Transportation department data recorded 92 fatalities on the affected stretches of I-10 and I-20 from 1999-01, when speed limits were 70 mph. After raising limits to 75 mph, the deaths dropped 13

percent from 2002-04.

The only negative part of this situation is that the nighttime speed limit remains ludicrously underposted at 65 mph.

There is no valid reason for this outdated law. The U.S. Department of Energy says that you burn more gas at 80 mph, claiming that every 5 mph over 60 costs you 20 cents per gallon.

That's roughly 25 percent to 30 percent worse fuel economy. The statement is greatly exaggerated and misleading.

In reality, nowhere do vehicles log better gas mileage than on sparsely traveled highways through the desert or Great Plains.

In May, my wife and I drove all over West Texas.

At 79 mph, our midsize V-6 sedan yielded 32 miles per gallon — twice. Driving I-10 across the Southeast at 74 mph, our car logged an average of 28 mpg, with a best of 30 mpg.

Despite driving faster in the desert, we burned 10 percent less fuel than on comparable roads in the Southeast or anywhere else.

If the energy or transportation departments wished to save us gas, they should encourage the proper posting, setting, timing and synchronization of all traffic control devices.

Traffic control malpractice wastes billions of gallons of gas annually, while costing us time, money, more pollution and accidents.

Kudos to Texas. Still, most of the state's freeways are underposted.

If properly, safely and legally set, most urban interstate speeds would be 70, and rural freeways would be 80 mph.

It's time for Americans' rights, freedom and safety to be more important than government/insurance profits.

**Greg Mauz
Christoval**

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Crackdown targets speeders

44 citations issued in two-hour period

By **JENNIFER RIOS**

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Zero tolerance was shown Tuesday morning to speeders.

Spread along the Houston Harte Expressway on Tuesday, San Angelo police and Tom Green County

sheriff's deputies stopped speeding drivers in the first day of their combined effort to reduce the number of crashes in the city. The special program was in effect from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m., and will continue once a week for several weeks. Officers wrote 44 citations — 33,

speeding; eight, no insurance; three, other violations.

Traffic Sgt. Korby Kennedy said everybody who was stopped received a ticket. The average speed of violators was 75 mph — 10 mph over the posted speed limit.

According to municipal court calculations, each ticket would average \$142.

Writing tickets may be good for the Police Department and city, which profit from the fees, but it doesn't

necessarily solve the problem, one local expert said.

Greg Mauz, traffic-safety researcher for the National Motorists Association and a Christoval resident, said the primary reason for crashes is not excessive speed but inattention to driving.

Mauz, who has researched traffic safety 23 years, said the majority of crashes are caused by distractions

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in the vehicle."

Cell phone use and particularly text messaging are the most dangerous forms of not paying attention," Mauz said. "It takes too much cognitive thought away from driving."

One further step Mauz suggests in traffic safety education is sending someone into high schools and talking to students about paying attention behind the wheel.

Police Chief Tim Vasquez said because of staff shortages, the department cannot afford to do that. Vasquez said the

purpose of increased enforcement is not just tickets. Traffic stops where officers give a citation or a written or verbal warning increase awareness in trouble areas.

"Statistically, if you see an increase in the number of citations, you see a decrease in the number of vehicle accidents," he said.

Because no laws are passed that can cite drivers for text messaging while driving, Vasquez said, "distraction in the vehicle" is something officers can only write in their crash report as a cause or contributor to the collision. "Seeing them using a cell phone, that's not a violation of the law yet," he said. "Yet."

*Totally false.
Speed causes only 2% of ALL crashes.
Speed enforcement often increases crashes.
See: Speed Enforcement studies.*

Greg Mauz

Cops admit, "Overemphasis on traffic stops."

Third candidate announces bid to run for police chief

July 3, 07

By **PAUL A. ANTHONY**
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Twenty-year patrol veteran K.D. Barnes turned the campaign for San Angelo police chief into a three-way race Monday, telling the Standard-Times he plans to file his candidacy in February.

Barnes, the San Angelo Police Department's hit-and-run investigator and a motorcycle officer for the past 18 years, said he believes the department needs a change from the policies of incumbent Chief Tim Vasquez, who is seeking a second term.

"The last few years have been pretty rough down there," Barnes said. "It needs changes because it's not working."

Barnes is the second challenger in a week to say he will run against Vasquez, following narcotics Sgt. Ed Kading, who announced his intentions Friday.

Both candidates have criticized the minimum work standards Vasquez put into place for patrol officers — Barnes in particular, saying they have led to decreased morale and an overemphasis on traffic stops.

"It's forcing these guys out of the neighborhoods, and it's moving them out on the main streets to write tickets to get points," Barnes said. "Patrolling your neighborhood, just looking for burglaries, trying to prevent thefts — you don't get points for that."

The minimum work standards do not reward officers any more for writing tickets than for giving warnings, Vasquez said.

"This was the only way, due to civil service, to hold an officer accountable for their performance," he said in an e-mail. It "had to (be) based off a scientific number."

The Barnes file

- Name: K.D. Barnes.
- Age: 46.
- Position: Motorcycle officer, traffic section, patrol division, San Angelo Police Department; hit-and-run investigator.
- Position sought: Chief of police.
- Education: Graduated from Central High School in 1980. Attended Angelo State University for two years.
- Experience: More than 20 years as a member of the city police patrol division, including more than 18 as a motorcycle officer.

Barnes also questioned Vasquez's assertions that the department is divided because of recent de-facto unionization efforts and the impending chief's race.

Rather, Barnes said, the

department has lost morale because of pressure imposed by the minimum work standards.

"The department is not a close-knit bunch right now," he said. "It's hurting the public. People are the victims, and they're more concerned about points and statistics."

If elected, Barnes said, he would reorganize the department to eliminate desk-only jobs and increase patrols by putting more officers on the streets.

"We're extremely short-handed on the streets, and we've got officers who do nothing but work desk jobs," he said. "The mind-set's got to change."



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Vasquez has cited declining crime numbers as one of his most significant accomplishments while in office.

According to a Texas Department of Public Safety survey supplied by Vasquez, index crimes — murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny and vehicle theft — declined by more than 21 percent between 2004 and 2006, and property crime, a subset of the index crimes, dropped by 22.5 percent.

Barnes and Kading, however, said they believe crime is rising in San Angelo.

"I don't see where the 25 percent (decrease) is coming from," Barnes said.