

TxDOT is too slow

■ Lowering speed limits is not safe

The sins of the Texas Department of Transportation are many: endorsing the Trans-Texas Corridor; wasting/losing money; endorsing fraudulent, crash-causing ticket cameras; buying/displaying dishonest research and the paving fiasco on Highway 277, to name a few. We the people pay for all this.

GREG MAUZ

VIEWPOINTS

The latest sin involves TxDOT's unethical, even dangerous (mal) practice of lowering speed limits. Every time there is a very rare act of carelessness resulting in a serious crash, some emotional, misinformed politician asks TxDOT to lower the speed limit. Never mind that the vast majority of crashes result from not paying attention, drunken driving and failure to yield.

For the record — you cannot prevent random acts of carelessness or stupidity. And laws should be based on objective facts, not emotional reactions.

Lately crashes are on a small upward trend. This should be expected. The thriving economy, plus super-low gas prices, have everyone driving again. Gas sales are finally at 2007 levels (before the Great Recession) and the Federal Highway Administration figures show miles driven are way up. More miles equals more risk, hence more crashes. Again, speed limits are not the problem.

TxDOT is even trying to lower some interstate speed limits, such as I-10 near Beaumont, which finally posted a proper 75 mph just three years ago. In 2011 Rep. Gary Elkins (and I) helped pass HB 1353, which repealed the unjust nighttime 65 mph limit and permitted more 75 mph limits (should be 80) on other appropriate highways.

Ironically, nobody is asking to lower the limit. The Beaumont City Council correctly voted 6-0 to keep 75. However, TxDOT traffic ops Director Caryl Rawson — an unelected official — decided on her own to lower the speed limit a huge 10 mph down to 65 despite TxDOT's own engineering study showing that 75 is a properly set, safe speed limit.

The Institute of Transportation Engineers' and Federal Highway Administration engineers' vast research shows that lowering speed limits causes more crashes, injuries and fatalities. Underposted

limits "disrupt the (safe) uniform traffic flow which increases accident potential between the faster and slower drivers."

Low speed limits also increase tailgating, lane surfing and make yielding more difficult and decrease yellow time at traffic signals — all of which can cause more crashes.

Honest research also reveals that the slowest drivers crash the most and interstates — despite the highest travel speeds — have the lowest death rate of all roads.

Drivers old enough to remember know the national maximum 55 mph speed limit (1974-1995) turned a nation of safe drivers into "speeding" criminals. By the grace of God, the National Motorists Associa-

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tion (and I) helped repeal that incredibly unjust law on Nov. 28, 1995.

For 22 years the profiteers of speed enforcement (government, police and insurance) spouted "55 Saves Lives." They made dire predictions of 2,500 to 9,000 extra deaths after 36 states raised their speed limits to 70-75 mph. Reality: There occurred 400 fewer fatalities on all U.S. freeways (1995-1997).

Montana — with no daytime speed limit — scored a record safe year in 1996. And the West German Autobahn — with 4,100 miles of no speed limit — scored a 12 percent lower MFR than U.S. Interstates (.87 fatalities per 100 million miles driven vs. Germany's .77).

West Texas' I-20 (89 miles) and I-10 (432 miles) posted a 70 mph limit from 1999-2001 and recorded 92 fatalities. From 2002-2004 at 75 mph, the fatalities dropped to 80, for a 13 percent decline.

The Martin Parker Report (FHWA, 1997) studied speed limit changes at 100 sites for five years. It recorded 1.6 million speed measurements. Where speed limits went up, crashes went down. Lowered limits resulted in more crashes.

According to decades of engineering research and speed limit law (Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices), the speed limit should be 85th percentile — the free-flowing speed at or below which 85 percent of people drive — rounded up to the next 5 mph increment. Some engineers and safety experts (me included) recommend a 90th percentile limit on Interstates.

TxDOT "policy" allows bogus excuses to round down: driveways, pedestrians, roadside development, etc. Drivers already adjust their speeds accordingly.

Then there is the 12-month crash trend baloney. An honest engineer/researcher knows that it takes five years to create accident trends, not 12 months. And honest trends do not compare recession years to vibrant economy years.

In Texas, comparing 2012-2014's 3,460 average annual traffic deaths to 2009-2011's about 3,100 average is not a valid comparison. Texas' economy tanked from 2009 to 2011. There is no greater reducer of traffic deaths than a serious recession. Recessions in 1974, 1992 and 2008-2009 all created record safe years in the United States.

A fair comparison shows current Texas fatality trends and MFRs are improved from the 2003-2008 data, despite Texans driving more than 20 billion more miles.

TxDOT also claims "policy" allows it to round down a very unethical 12 mph below the 85th percentile. ITE says you should never go more than 8 mph below, which constitutes an illegal act in several states (including Florida and Massachusetts). TxDOT "policy" used to be 10 mph below — still wrong. It should be illegal to post a speed limit more than 4 mph below the 85th percentile speed.

Since underposted limits do not slow

See MAUZ, 2D

TxDOT SL Manual says no more than 7 below 85th Page 3-17.

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from ID

traffic speeds, a speed limit 8-12 mph below the 85th percentile cannot even garner a 30 percent compliance (just like 55). Any law that more than 70 percent of people disagree with is a bad law.

Underposted speed limits are undemocratic, violate drivers' rights and heinously allow police and insurance to usurp money from motorists driving at reasonable, safe speeds, all while causing more crashes, injuries and fatalities.

Conversely, setting proper 85th percentile speed limits creates voluntary compliance, uniform traffic flow, more honest enforcement, etc. And real research consistently proves that the 85th percentile (90th

on Interstates) is the safest speed limit.

There are dozens of ways to improve traffic safety. However, lowering speed limits has never been one of them.

Since interstates/free-ways have no cross traffic, no driveways, no pedestrians and no traffic signals, there remains no reason to ever round down from the 85th percentile speed. Furthermore, there is no valid reason to round down (underpost) a speed limit on any road.

Most urban freeways should be posted at 70-75 mph, while most rural highways can safely post 80 mph. A limit of 65 — whether I-10 in Beaumont or I-20 near Odessa — is so unreasonably low it will create an unjust, immoral speed trap and more deaths.

Since more than 90

percent of people drive safely (fewer than 5 percent crash annually), the speed limit is supposed to, by law, reflect their reasonable speeds, not the other way around. Speed limits based on politicians, police or DOT misinformed opinions are illegal.

TxDOT needs to abolish this dishonest, counterproductive engineering malpractice. All lowered speed limits need to be raised. In the interest of truth, justice, freedom and real safety, all speed limits should be checked and properly set to the 85th percentile, rounded up, not down.

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Isaiah 10:1

Proverbs 11:1

<p>Colorado Interstates (1995 - 1999) NHTSA</p>	<p>In 1995 65 SL = 118 fatal crashes. In 1999 75 SL = 104 fatal crashes for a 12% reduction in fatal accidents.</p>	<p>2014 Tx Speed (over limit) = 289 of 5815 fatal factors = only 5% - a 39% improvement since 2008 473 of 5545 = 8.5%</p>
<p>New Mexico Interstates (1995 - 1999) NHTSA</p>	<p>In 1995 65 SL = 99 fatal crashes. In 1999 75 SL = 88 fatal crashes for an 11% reduction in fatal accidents.</p>	
<p>Florida Interstates Rural (1997 - 2001) NHTSA</p>	<p>Speed limit raised to 70 MPH. Fatal crashes = 166 in 97 to 145 in 99 to 113 in 2001 (-53 or a 32% improvement). Add VMT = >32% improvement.</p>	
<p>West Texas Interstates I - 10 432 miles I - 20 89 miles (1999 - 2004) TxDOT</p>	<p>From 1999 - 2001 70 MPH speed limit = 92 fatalities. From 2002 - 2004 75 MPH SL = 80 fatalities for a -13% decline.</p>	
<p>Mauz Report "Setting Speed Limits - An Epidemic of Malpractice" (September 1999)</p>	<p>Arizona Transportation Research Center favorably reviewed. Refuted enforcement for profit deceptions. "Speeding" causes only 2% of all crashes. Refuted TRBs "Managing Speed,,,,," (1998). Faster drivers are safer. 85%ile Law should be enforced by withholding highway funds. Unjust, excessive speeding fines documented. LADHS = lowest fatality rates and fatal crashes. Lower speed limits increase crashes . Speed does NOT KILL. Not paying attention kills. DWI Kills. Overzealous speed enforcement Kills. Cameras Kill. Proper 85%ile speed limits save lives.</p>	