



Transportation, Communications, and Public Works Policy Committee Legislative Agenda

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1. [AB 43 \(Friedman\) Traffic Safety.](#)

Bill Summary:

This measure would grant the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and local authorities greater flexibility in setting speed limits based on recommendations from the Zero Traffic Fatality Task Force (Task Force).

Bill Description:

Specifically, this measure would:

- Authorize a local agency, by resolution or ordinance, to lower speed limits by five miles per hour (mph) below a traffic engineer's recommendation after a traffic survey for the following reasons:
 - The portion of the street has been designated as a high-injury street;
 - The portion of the street is adjacent to land or a facility that generates a high concentration of bicycles or pedestrians;
- Authorize a local agency to retain an existing speed limit or revert to a previously established speed limit if a registered engineer has evaluated the section of highway and determined there has been no significant design changes;
- Authorize a business activity district to have a prima facie speed limit of 25 or 20 mph;
- Expand the exemptions of speed traps not to include senior zones or business activity districts, permitting law enforcement to use radar guns to enforce speed limits in those areas without the justification of a traffic survey;
- Extend the period that an engineering and traffic survey justifies a speed from 10 to 14 years if a traffic engineer evaluates that section of the street and determines that no significant changes in roadway or traffic conditions have occurred; and
- Expand which streets are eligible for school zone speed limits.

Background:

California bases its speed limits on a process known as the 85th percentile rule. With this process, traffic surveyors measure the speed drivers drive and set the speed limit to reflect what 85 percent of drivers were driving at. According to the author, this method is not based on safety but rather on the speed drivers feel comfortable, leading to traffic-related injuries and fatalities. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), the National Association of City Transportation Safety Officials, and the California Transportation Agency (CalSTA) have all indicated the need to reform how speed limits are set.

Reducing speed limits has been shown to reduce both injuries and fatalities on the road. According to the University of California Institute of Traffic Studies, research has shown reducing speed limits on limited-access roads by five miles per hour can reduce injuries between 8 percent and 15 percent, with some studies finding reductions as great as 28 percent and 39 percent. A range of research also suggests lowering speed limits may result in the number of fatalities dropping by 10 percent to 30 percent, with one outlier study showing an 80 percent reduction in fatalities.

