FAQs on the California Manual for Setting Speed Limits

The following is a list of frequently asked questions (FAQs) on the California Manual on Setting Speed Limits. If after reviewing this document you have further questions, please email the CA MUTCD Editor at CAMUTCD@dot.ca.gov with the Subject heading "California Manual on Setting Speed Limits".

General Questions

1. Q: Who is responsible for setting speed limits?

   A: The California Vehicle Code (CVC) 22349, Maximum Speed Limit, prescribes the speed limits in California. When speeds are to be lowered based on an Engineering and Traffic Survey (E&TS) on the State Highways, the District Traffic Engineer is charged with determining speed limits. On local roads, the local agency has this function.

2. Q: What justifies lowering the speed by 5 mph from the 85th percentile speed?

   A: An engineer using engineering judgment makes this determination and should be based on roadway collision history, geometrics, user type, and other factors as deemed appropriate by the engineer.

3. Q: How often are speed zones updated?

   A: Speed Zone Surveys are valid for 5 years and may be extended to 7 years if specific criteria on radar operator certification, equipment calibration, and training have been met. A survey may be extended to 10 years if the engineer determines all above criteria have been met and no significant changes in roadway or traffic conditions have occurred.

4. Q: What happens when an agency sets a speed limit to an arbitrarily low speed in order to appease a local neighborhood?

   A: When speed limits are lowered without an E&TS, with some exceptions, speeding violations issued to drivers may be thrown out in court. Exceptions include speed limits that are near schools, senior centers, or in business districts.

5. Q: What traffic conditions are necessary in order to conduct an E&TS?

   A: Dry road conditions, off-peak hour traffic under free-flow conditions on an average weekday is necessary in order to capture data for a valid E&TS. If vehicles are in a platoon, the first vehicle's speed is measured.