



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Robert Spillar, P.E., Director,
Austin Transportation Department 

DATE: June 9, 2020

**SUBJECT: Speed Management Program Development Updates Regarding
Recommended Speed Limit Changes and Speed Mitigation**

At the May 28, 2020, Mobility Committee, the Austin Transportation Department (ATD) presented its citywide Speed Management Program, including recommendations for speed limit changes on many streets throughout Austin. On February 6, 2020, I provided the Mayor and Council an update on our progress developing a prioritization process for installing speed mitigation treatments on neighborhood streets. This memo provides responses to questions received from Council, along with a status update on developing speed mitigation elements of the Speed Management Program.

Background

ATD recently completed a year-long comprehensive engineering study of speed limits on City roadways throughout the City of Austin. Specifically, the engineering team evaluated Level 1, 2, and 3 streets as defined in the *Austin Strategic Mobility Plan*. These include neighborhood streets typically characterized as having residential units fronting on one or both sides of the street, neighborhood collectors, arterials within the Urban Core (defined as the area bounded by US 183, SH 71, and Loop 1), and downtown core streets serving as both residential and commercial oriented streets.

These studies indicate that speed limit changes are warranted on a broad basis within the City of Austin. Item 45 on the June 11th agenda, is a Request for Council Action (RCA) to modify speed limits on neighborhood and downtown streets, and urban core arterial streets to meet the safe and prudent speeds identified by engineering analysis.

Responses to Mobility Committee

Q1. What is ATD's timeline to study Level 3 streets outside of the Urban Core and recommend speed limit modifications?

A1. ATD estimates engineering analysis of all remaining Level 3 streets, including speed limit modification recommendations, could be completed by spring 2021. Most of the inputs needed for our expert systems analysis are easily accessible. However, primary inputs of traffic speed and volume are currently affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic and resulting reduced traffic volumes and behaviors. ATD will monitor traffic conditions and collect

speed and volume data this fall on Level 3 streets outside of the Urban Core, assuming traffic returns to more typical conditions. We would then complete our engineering studies and recommendations next spring.

Q2. What portion of the High-Injury Network (HIN) did ATD study under the current speed limit modification recommendations?

A2. ATD focused on Level 3 streets within the Urban Core, which comprises approximately half of the HIN. Upon completion of studying the City's remaining Level 3 streets, the entire HIN will have been considered. We will prioritize the remaining Level 3 streets requiring analysis based on HIN rankings.

Q3. What is ATD's timeline to study neighborhood streets between 36 feet and 40 feet wide to recommend speed limit modifications?

A3. ATD will study these streets as areas are prioritized for installation of 25 mph signage for streets narrower than 36 feet wide, rather than a comprehensive, citywide approach. ATD's analysis of these individual streets could determine that 25 mph speed limits are appropriate with no street modifications. However, we may determine that restriping to narrower lane widths; assignment of portions of the street for alternative uses such as biking or parking lanes; change in parking utilization; or other treatments may be necessary to create operating characteristic conducive to effectively lowering the speed limit to 25 mph.

Q4. Can ATD provide City Council Members maps showing proposed speed limit modifications?

A4. ATD anticipates providing interactive, web-based maps for City Council Members and the public prior to June 11. These maps will provide a preliminary view of which neighborhood streets would be set at 25 mph based on available street width data. Prior to installing new signage, ATD will measure actual built street widths to confirm the accuracy of information provided in the maps and adjust them accordingly.

Q5. Can ATD consider a color-coded system on street signs and markings to correspond with particular speed limits?

A5. By law, ATD follows the *Texas Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices*, which is included in the City of Austin's Code and the State's Texas Transportation Code. This manual provides guidance on the uniform design and placement of signs and markings state-wide. The use of colors for regulatory signs (including speed limit signs) and warning signs is strictly controlled to provide consistent messages to the traveling public. However, ATD has flexibility in designing the text and appearance of informational or warning signs. While these could not look similar to other standard regulatory signs, we could consider our own design of a warning message on a yellow background relating to speeds if appropriate.

Other options we may consider to enhance the noticeability of signs include the following:

- Increase the size of signs
- Add supplemental yellow signs with messages such as NOTICE, NEW, etc.
- Add red borders or flags
- Add supplemental flashing beacons
- Include reflective materials on poles
- Install speed limit pavement markings
- Install Dynamic Speed Display Devices to display the speed of oncoming vehicles

ATD will evaluate material and maintenance costs to determine the optimum benefits based on the various life cycle costs of each option.

Speed Management Program Development Update

Concurrent to our efforts to evaluate speed limit modifications, ATD has created a process to evaluate and prioritize streets for speed mitigation treatments on neighborhood streets. This new approach includes a balanced consideration of crash history, risk characteristics, and speed profile. The prioritization framework also includes equity considerations; proximity to community destinations and transit; and existing or planned pedestrian and bicycle facilities, among other factors.

We have begun to develop schematic-level “toolbox” designs for low-cost, effective speed mitigation projects based on available budget. ATD anticipates sharing the program guidelines, toolbox of speed mitigation treatments, and top tier of streets to you and the public next month. Neighborhood outreach and advanced design would continue this summer for the top tier of streets following appropriate safe distancing practices. We anticipate some of these projects to be in construction by the end of this calendar year.

CC: Spencer Cronk, City Manager
Gina Fiandaca, Assistant City Manager