

CITY OF SEATTLE

VISION ZERO: SPEED LIMIT REDUCTION FAQ

What is happening to the speed limit in Seattle?

The City of Seattle is proposing new speed limit measures to enhance street safety – thanks to a new proposal from Mayor Ed Murray and Councilmember Tim Burgess.

Proposed changes include reducing the speed limit on all residential streets from 25 to 20 MPH and on streets in the center city from 30 to 25 MPH.

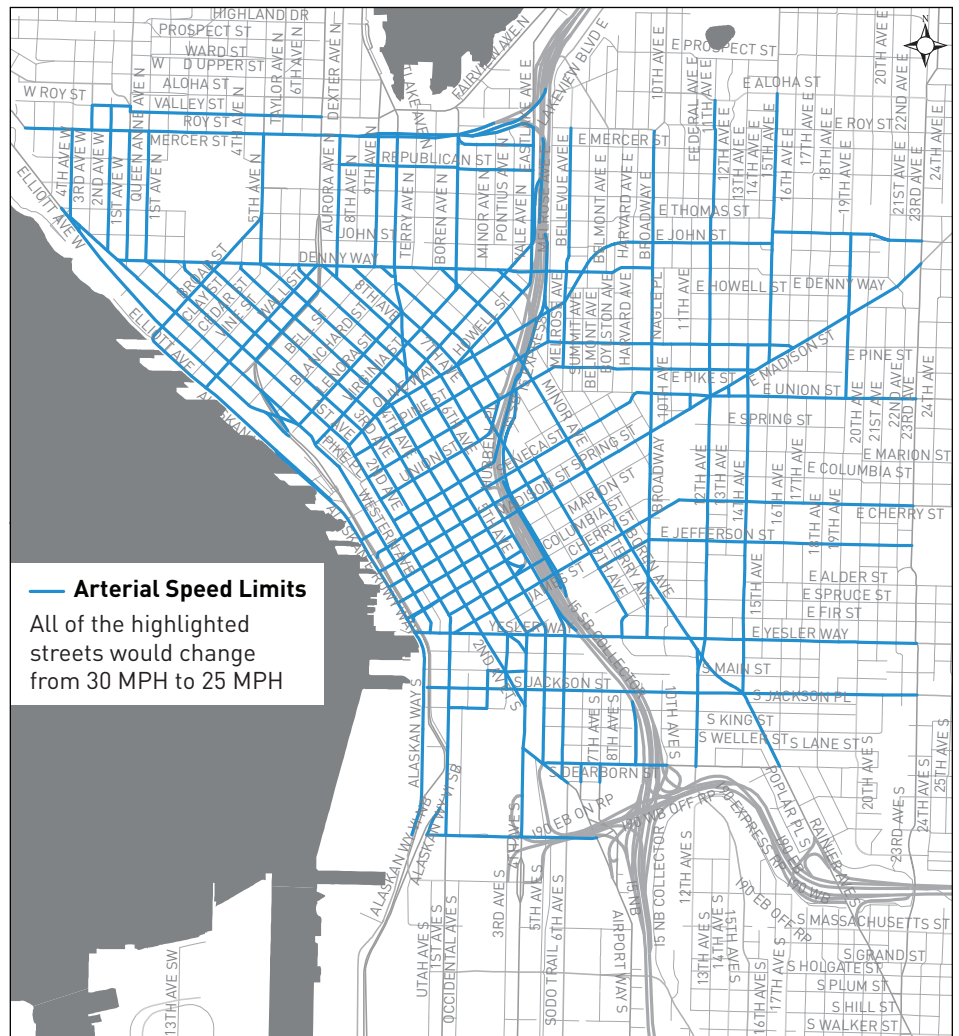
This is part of Seattle’s Vision Zero plan to end traffic deaths and serious injuries on city streets by 2030.

Why is this necessary?

While Seattle is one of the safest cities in the country, each year about 20 people are killed in traffic collisions and another 150 are seriously injured. Their lives are cut short or changed forever, impacting their families, friends, and broader communities. One life lost or altered is one life too many.

And while safety has generally improved over time, we still see our most vulnerable travelers (those walking and biking) impacted disproportionately.

People who are hit while walking or bicycling make up only 7% of crashes, but 47% of fatalities. And, 9 out of 10 bicycle/pedestrian collisions result in injury. Reducing the speed limit will help save lives and make Seattle streets safer for everyone.



HIT BY A VEHICLE TRAVELING AT:
20 MPH

9 out of 10 pedestrians survive

HIT BY A VEHICLE TRAVELING AT:
30 MPH

5 out of 10 pedestrians survive

HIT BY A VEHICLE TRAVELING AT:
40 MPH

Only 1 out of 10 pedestrians survives

Will reducing the speed by a few miles per hour really make a difference?

Yes. Speed contributes to 25% of traffic fatalities citywide, and 42% of downtown traffic fatalities every year.

Speed is a critical factor in whether you survive a car crash: People who are walking are twice as likely to live after being hit by a car at 25 MPH than at 30 MPH. This small speed limit reduction doubles the odds of survival. That's why every other city in King County, and major cities like New York, Los Angeles, Washington, DC, Portland, Denver, and Houston have already made this choice and have a speed limit of 25 MPH or lower.

Reducing the speed limit works for several reasons: One, it gives people who drive, walk, and bike more time to see each other and react. Two, reducing the speed limit decreases cars' stopping distance. (Reducing the speed limit from 30 to 25 MPH decreases stopping distance by 45 feet, or 23%.)

In many cases, the change will help people avoid crashes altogether. If a crash does occur, the reduced speed will reduce its severity, so people have less serious injuries.

Won't lowering the speed limit make traffic worse?

Not much: The average car trip in Seattle is 3.5 miles. Reducing that car's speed from 30 to 25 MPH will add 1 minute and 15 seconds to the trip – just over a minute to save a life.

But, most of the time, drivers in 30 MPH speed zones are already going 25 MPH during peak commute times. That's because, in the center city, signal timing has already been adjusted to 25 MPH and drivers are moving more efficiently through the city.

What's more, travel time is primarily determined by factors like traffic signals, congestion (often caused by crashes), and obstacles like double-parked vehicles and turning vehicles. A reduced speed limit will effectively impact drivers who travel at excessive, unsafe speeds and save lives while getting Seattle where it needs to go.

On most neighborhood streets, it's already difficult to drive faster than 20 MPH due to street widths, traffic circles, and parking. When people do speed, it is especially dangerous for our youngest and oldest residents living and playing in their neighborhoods.

Why is the City targeting drivers?

Vision Zero targets dangerous behaviors and choices – like speeding – not specific people.

Reaching Seattle's goal of zero traffic fatalities and serious injuries by 2030 requires people who drive, walk, and bike to all be part of the solution. Reducing the speed limit gives everyone more time to see each other and avoid a crash.

Drivers benefit, too, from having better ability to stop in time to avoid a crash. No one should go through life knowing that they caused a traffic-related death or injury.

On neighborhood streets, going from 25 to 20 MPH essentially expands the existing school zone speed limit to cover all 2,400 miles of residential streets, creating safer routes for everyone in neighborhoods across the city.

Sometimes, an accident is just an accident. Why are we focusing on speed?

Most car crashes can be prevented by avoiding dangerous choices like speeding – they are not truly "accidents." Vision Zero recognizes that humans make mistakes, but

they should not be deadly or lead to a life-altering injury.

By reducing the speed limit, we can create a safer place for Seattle residents to live, work, and play at the speed of life.

What is the status of this change? When does it take effect?

Mayor Ed Murray and Councilmember Tim Burgess unveiled their safety proposal on September 6, 2016.

The next steps include:

- September 20: Discussion and vote by the Seattle City Council's Sustainability and Transportation Committee
- September 26: Discussion and vote by the full Seattle City Council
- 10 day period for Mayor Murray to sign legislation into law
- 30 day period for the law to take effect

November is the anticipated roll-out timeframe for adding or altering hundreds of new signs, launching a public education campaign, and enforcement.

How will the law be enforced? What will be done to educate drivers about the lower speed limit?

If the proposal becomes law, the City of Seattle expects to use enforcement to deter violations of the speed limit. In addition, the City plans to undertake a comprehensive public education campaign to reach Seattle residents with information about the speed limit reduction before the new law would take effect.

Learn more about Vision Zero at www.seattle.gov/visionzero.