



4800 Ashford Dunwoody Road
 Dunwoody, Georgia 30338
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MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and City Council

From: Michael Smith, Public Works Director

Date: February 22, 2021

Subject: **Discussion of Speed Limit Policy**

BACKGROUND

Councilman Secorder has requested a City Council discussion of speed limit policy. The city's policy has been to follow state law and policy and national standards when setting or adjusting speed limits. On the few occasions since incorporation that a speed limit has been changed, an engineering evaluation to validate the proposed change has been initiated based on specific citizen concerns or a City Council request and the speed limit change has been submitted to the state for approval.

State Law and Policy

Outside of the I-285 corridor (including Cotillion Drive) and the Peachtree Industrial Boulevard Access Road, none of the roads in the city are part of the federal or state highway system and the city has the ability to set speed limits on its local streets. However, state law requires a permit issued by the Georgia Department of Public Safety in order for local law enforcement to use speed detection devices such as radar to enforce the speed limit. The Department of Public Safety's regulations require radar permit applicants to verify that speed limits have been determined based on an engineering and traffic investigation as required by Georgia's Uniform Rules of the Road laws and the Federal Highway Administration's Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). The Department of Public Safety relies on the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) to review and certify these engineering studies when a speed limit change is proposed. The same process is required for designation of school speed zones.

In essence, if a local jurisdiction wants to change a speed limit and enforce it using radar speed detection, the jurisdiction must submit an engineering study justifying the speed change and GDOT must review and approve it. The state does not approve any speed limits less than 25 mph.

National Standard

The Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) is the national standard for roadway traffic control including speed limit signage. The standard regarding speed limits in the MUTCD states that "speed zones shall only be established on the basis of an engineering study that has been performed in accordance with traffic engineering practices. The engineering study shall include an analysis of the current speed distribution of free-flowing vehicles." The



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supporting guidance for the speed zone standard states that the following factors may be considered when establishing or reevaluating speed limits:

- Road characteristics, shoulder conditions, grade, alignment and sight distance
- The pace of traffic
- Roadside development and environment
- Parking practices and pedestrian activity
- Reported crash experience for at least a 12-month period

Historically, the pace of traffic (e.g. 85th percentile speed), and curvature of the roadway have been primary considerations that agencies including GDOT have relied on when setting speed limits. National guidance appears to be moving towards more flexibility and consideration of other characteristics of the roadway when setting speed limits.

DISCUSSION

Many drivers tend to be influenced more by the roadway environment and what they perceive as a safe speed rather than a strict adherence to posted speed limits. An example of this behavior can be seen on some of the city's neighborhood streets where the posted speed limit is 25 mph. At some locations, traffic calming has been installed because the majority of drivers were driving over the speed limit. The effective way to alter the behavior was not to further lower the speed limit but to change the roadway characteristics.

There may be opportunities to make incremental reductions in speed limits at some locations that could be approved by the state and thereby be more enforceable.