

Traffic Commission

The City of La Mesa recently established a Traffic Commission, made up of citizens from the community, appointed by the City Council, to serve as a decision-making body on everyday traffic issues and as an advisory panel to the City Council on major issues. The Commission consists of five members serving four year terms. All of the five members must be La Mesa residents.

Meetings will take place monthly on the first Wednesday of the month at 9:00 am in the City Council Chambers located at City Hall. These meetings will be open to the public. The Commission will make decisions on citizen requests for stop sign or traffic signal installation and other issues, as well as provide recommendations to the City Council on citizen requests that require Council action.

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Speed Limits and the California Vehicle Code

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Why Not Just Lower the Speed Limit?

One of the most common requests the Traffic Engineering Division receives from citizens is to post lower speed limits in areas where vehicles often are observed at speeds that seem unsafe. While that may appear to be a simple straightforward solution to a frustrating problem, speed limits must be set in accordance with State laws that protect drivers from "speed traps" or unreasonably low speed limits given the design of the roadway.

Research in driver behavior consistently shows that drivers respond to the driving environment, not the posted speed limit. Important components of the driving environment include the weather conditions, the geometry and landscaping of the roadway, and the speed at which others drive. If a roadway feels safe to be driven 45 MPH by the typical driver, that is the speed they will drive even if the posted speed limit is 25 MPH.

Traffic engineers can influence speeds by altering the driving environment, which can be a complicated process. Often "soft improvements" are implemented first, such as signing and striping improvements. In more extreme cases "hard improvements" such as landscaping or alignment improvements are necessary.

What does the California Vehicle Code Say about Speeding?

The Basic Speed Law in the California Vehicle Code states that "no person shall drive a vehicle upon a highway at a speed greater than is reasonable or prudent having due regard for weather, visibility, the traffic on, and the surface and width of, the highway, and in no event at a speed which endangers the safety of persons or property".

Certain roadways have default or "prima facie" speed limits: for example, prima facie limits are 15 MPH in alleys and at railway at-grade crossings, and 25 MPH in school zones, near senior citizen residences and on streets where no posted speed limit exists.

There are special rules for posted speed limits on streets that are part of the federal-aid highway system, which includes all City streets classified as arterials (like Fletcher Parkway or University Avenue) or collectors (like Harbinson Avenue or Severin Drive). Posted speed limits on these roadways must be justified by a traffic engineering speed survey performed at least once every seven years. Speed limits are determined by the 85th percentile speed.

Speed limits on streets classified as local (or residential) streets do not need to be justified by a speed survey. These streets have a prima facie limit of 25 MPH.

What is the City of La Mesa Doing to Discourage Speeding?

The Traffic Engineering Division is taking a variety of measures aimed to identify where excessive speeding is taking place and to reduce the number of speeding infractions on City streets.

- Identifying potential problem areas from citizen requests for enforcement and cooperating with the La Mesa Police Department to increase enforcement in those areas.
- Initiating a formal process for traffic calming in neighborhoods experiencing problems with excessive volumes of traffic or speeding, which can lead to roadway improvements to discourage speeding.
- Maintaining a database of speed survey results for federal-aid streets to ensure their speed limits are justifiable.
- Updating the functional classification of City streets with the Federal Highway Administration.
- Maintaining a database of crashes on City streets and at intersections to help determine if certain areas are experiencing collision rates above normal where speeding might be a contributing factor.