



MAPC PLANNING

## SPEED LIMITS & SAFETY ZONES



**The Municipal Modernization Act** amends Chapter 90 of the Massachusetts General Laws to allow municipalities to reduce speed limits on specified roadways in the interest of public safety. Cities and towns are now permitted to reduce the speed limit to 25 miles per hour on any local, non-state roadway in a thickly settled or business district. It is the responsibility of the city or town to notify the Department of Transportation of the change.

Furthermore, the legislation allows municipalities to create designated Safety Zones, which are specific roadways with a posted speed limit of 20 miles per hour. Safety Zones may be established on, at, or near any non-state highway without prior MassDOT approval. However, the Department of Transportation must grant approval of Safety Zones on, at, or near any state highway.

### MassDOT has created the following minimum criteria for communities looking to create a Safety Zone:

- The street should be adjacent to a land use that is likely to attract vulnerable road users.
- The Safety Zone should contain one or more areas that have potential conflicts between motor vehicles and vulnerable road users that warrant a reduction in speeds such as crosswalks, driveways, or side streets.
- The minimum length of the Safety Zone should be at least 1/4 of a mile and it should not extend more than 500' beyond a side street unless an applicable land use continues along the adjacent block.

**TO DISCUSS HOW MAPC CAN HELP YOUR COMMUNITY WITH PARKING BENEFITS DISTRICTS**  
[www.MAPC.org/transportation](http://www.MAPC.org/transportation) | Kasia Hart at [Khart@mapc.org](mailto:Khart@mapc.org) | 617.933.0745

[www.MAPC.org](http://www.MAPC.org)



60 Temple Place, Boston, MA 02111  
617.933.0700





*Reducing vehicle speeds is one of the most effective ways to reduce crashes and to promote the safety of all roadway users.*

## How is this different from before?

Prior to this legislation, cities and towns were statutorily obligated to have a posted speed limit of 30 miles per hour on any roadway in a thickly settled or business district. In some communities, 30 miles per hour may be too high, jeopardizing the safety of vulnerable road users. Allowing municipalities to reduce the speed limit to 25 miles per hour still maintains an efficient flow of traffic while creating a safer environment for all modes. In addition to reducing speed limits on certain roadways, municipalities can address safety concerns within a specific geography by instituting a Safety Zone. This is a particularly useful strategy for a region with a concentration of vulnerable road users, such as parks, day care facilities and senior centers. Ultimately, creating this flexibility in the legislation allows communities to adjust speed limits so that they more effectively address the public safety concerns in a particular context.

## How can MAPC help?

MAPC can help identify areas that may be appropriate to designate as a Safety Zone, and facilitate conversations between municipal staff and MassDOT for communities interested in implementing a Safety Zone on a state highway. Call today!

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