

Sample research paper on speed limit

[Transportation](#), [Road](#)



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Introduction

There comes a time when we feel that we know enough of a subject. It happens that knowing too much of a subject may make us feel confused, and we find ourselves unable to answer a simple question related to the subject conclusively. Speed limit and its effect on accidents is one such subject that we believe we know enough about but still find ourselves mumbling in uncertainty whether or not it is good or bad. Our common sense says that a speed limit is good. Otherwise, people will start driving at insanely high speed adding to the number of road accidents. However, it has been observed in more than one occasion that most of the drivers drive within the speed limit with or without any speed limit specification. There are only a few people with a tendency to over-speed and even fewer with the drive to drive dangerously. It is irrelevant for such drivers whether or not there is a specified speed limit. Since speed limit and its correlation with accidents is a

very delicate subject, trying to get into a conclusion without discussing all the aspects will be wrong. Speed limit leads to a good many favorable outcomes. However, there are some downsides to speed limit, as well. This essay will discuss the good and bad sides of speed limit laws, highlighting different statistics and finally will recommend the future changes that need be done in the current speeding laws.

Why is Speed Limit Good?

It is easy to argue that speeding laws are good. It takes no effort to convince a person that if the speeding limits are withdrawn, some people will begin to drive at breakneck speed on the roads causing a number of fatal accidents. There are higher chances for two cars travelling at 90 miles per hour to get into an accident than the two cars travelling at a speed of 65 miles per hour (Sedghi 2013). This is the logic used by most of the lawmakers, the federal government and law enforcement people while setting a speed limit. This logic is true, and it is almost an undeniable truth that speed limit is required. Another logic provided by the law makers is that there are different road conditions requiring moderation of speed by the drivers, and speed limits help drivers moderate their speed according to the traffic conditions (Sedghi 2013). For example, a person entering into a city from an interstate highway may continue to drive at the speed of 70 miles per hour if no other speed limit signs are displayed. 70 miles per hour may be a suitable driving speed on highways, but it is a dangerous speed inside the city limits. Speed limit signs help the motorists understand that they are entering into an area of reduced speed limit (Baxter). For example, in and around the school area in a city, a person going at the speed of 55 miles per hour would be considered

as driving dangerously because small school children may suddenly come to the road without any prior signal or indication. So even if 55 miles per hour is a safe speed in most other parts of the city, it is a dangerous speed limit in and around a school. Speed limit signs guide drivers in moderating their speed and ensure the safety of the slow moving traffic and the people on the road.

Why is Speed Limit Bad?

It is not very easy to argue why speed limit is bad. Firstly, we need to understand that most of us do not want to die or get into fatal accidents by choice. We always try to drive in a way to avoid accidents. As a rational animal, we all know that getting into an accident may have severe health and financial consequences. However, there are a selected few who have neither any respect for their own lives nor any for that of others, and they will continue to drive at whatever speed they want to irrespective of the speed signs (Baxter). Some sort of cautionary messages around the roads are probably necessary, but settling a speed limit in many places is a little overstretching. Speed limits set inside the sensitive zones within the city are required, but setting reduced speed limits on most of the highways seems an action stretched too far.

There are many types of people driving on the road. There are people comfortably driving at high speeds. They can control and maneuver their cars skillfully at high speeds. In fact, it is often seen that the drivers driving comfortably at high speed get into less number of accidents than others. There are senior citizen drivers driving at a much slower speed. They are comfortable driving at a speed lower than the average drivers. However,

slowest drivers on the road are given more priority than the average drivers when the speed limit is set. Speed limits are often set in a way that the slow drivers automatically represent the average speed (Waldman 2012). This way the overall speed on the road decreases. The question that naturally arises is why only slow moving drivers are given more importance than the average drivers while setting the speed limits, especially on the interstates where the road conditions are good and there is no interfering city traffic. Speed limit is bad in such cases as it slows down most of the drivers on the road.

Some Statistics

Before getting into some interesting statistics on speed limits, let us first discuss the speed limit history of the United States. Till the World War II, there were no speed limits marked on the roads in USA. There were signs on the road stating that a driver should use their own sense of judgment while driving. After the World War II was over, the federal government imposed a speed limit cap of 55 miles per hour in all the states of USA. The states were not allowed to modify that speed limit. However, the scenario changed when the prohibition was withdrawn in 1995, and then onwards every state began setting its own speed limits.

Resultantly, many states increased the speed limits on the roads. New York was one of the first states to have increased its speed limit from 55 mph to 65 mph. California soon followed suit by increasing its speed limit from 55 mph to 65 mph (Wilson 1998). However, in the next 2 years, the rate of accident on highways decreased by 4 percent in New York. For California, in 1997, the highway fatalities came down to all-time low in the history of the

state despite more traffic on the highways. In 1994, when the federal government was debating the waiving of the 55 mph speed limit, the Centre for Auto Safety predicted that 6,400 more people would die nationwide in addition to the death level of 41,000 per year at that time. However, the road accidents came down to a record low level in 1997 after the federal speed limit was removed (Wilson 1998).

However, FHWA reports suggested that between 1993 and 2004, the fatalities caused by a motorist over speeding are much higher than someone going below the speed limit. The accidents related to the categories "driving too fast for the condition" and "exceeding the posted speed limit" resulted in more percentage of fatality than other categories (FHWA 2005). It establishes the fact that high speed accidents cause much more serious damage.

In 1950, pioneering traffic engineer David Solomon determined that it is important for all the vehicles to move at a uniform speed. Too fast and too slow vehicles share an equal level of probability of meeting with an accident. This argument is used to set speed limits. As speed limits are made higher and higher, the disparity of speed on the road will increase adding to the number of road accidents. In fact, it is also empirically true that many of the traffic accidents happen because of the speed limit difference between the trucks (55 mph) and cars (65 or 70 mph) (Waldman 2012).

Also, it is a common myth that if the speed limit is increased, then most of the motorists will drive at the higher speed limit. The overall speed on the road will increase, thereby increasing the probability of road accidents. If that is true, then a state that has increased its speed limit by 10 mph on its

highways should see an average speed increase of close to 10 mph.

However, that is not true. It is empirically found that most of the drivers do not overshoot their speed comfort zones even if they are driving at a speed lower than the speed limit. It is observed in 20 states of USA that when the speed limits were increased by 5, 10 and in some cases by 15 miles per hour, the average speed on the roads increased by 2 miles per hour (Waldman 2012). This actually shows that most of the people drive in their speed comfort zones and do not try to overshoot.

Finally, there are places around the world with higher speed limits, and the road safeties in those countries are very robust. For example, Autobahn in Germany has no speed limit. Although there are few fatal accidents that happen every year in Autobahn, the number of accidents taking place in Autobahn in comparison to some of the similar roads in the United States is lower. France and the United Kingdom are more population dense countries than the United States, but still they have a highway speed limit of 75 mph which is more than that of USA interstates, and their accident rates are relatively low.

The above statistics bring out a number of interesting facts. Firstly, it is found that accidents at higher speed cause more fatalities. Secondly, it is not always true that an increase in the speed limit will turn all the motorists driving at the higher speed limit. In fact, most of the people prefer driving within their speed comfort zones. Thirdly, it is not true that increasing the speed limit will add to the number of accidents on the road. In fact, the statistics show otherwise. Finally, some other countries with higher speed limits have lower road accident numbers than the United States. Looking at

the facts and figures, we can say that the speed limit is not the only factor requiring regulation as there is something more to it.

Future of the Traffic Speed Limit

When speed limits were first introduced in 1950s, it was not easy for the policemen to monitor traffic and make sure everyone was driving at a safe speed. An easy way to control the traffic speed and dangerous driving pattern was to create a speed limit and impose heavy penalty on drivers violating it. This worked for most of the people for a long time. However, with the technological advancement, the policemen can now track traffic real time sitting in a control room and can take action almost immediately if someone violates the speed limit. It is easy for them to spot dangerous driving on the road nowadays. Traffic speed limit should be there. It is also important to detect dangerous driving, driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and unsafe road conditions.

Till now, the concept of speed limit remained static. Speed limit is currently set based on the speed of the “ 85th percentile speed” under good visibility and weather conditions (Waldman 2012). Suppose the speed limit of a typical Michigan Interstate is 70 miles per hour. That speed limit may be good during good weather condition or sunny summer days. However, 70 mph is a dangerous speed on a snowy winter road. If someone goes at the speed of 70 mph on an icy road during winter, even after knowing that it is extremely dangerous, the law enforcement officer cannot stop that person. Nowadays, most of the highways have dynamic display facilities that can be used to change the speed limit based on the weather conditions, road conditions, visibility and traffic conditions. Even dynamic speed limits can be

used within city limits, as well. For example, the speed limit near a school can be as low as 15 mph during busy hours but can be higher during other periods. Similarly, the speed in a city highway can be low when there is heavy traffic during the weekdays and can be increased during the weekends.

Conclusion

Speed limit is a highly debatable issue. However, one thing that is certain is that speed limit is required. At times, the state government and the federal government take an overcautious approach towards setting a speed limit. In many cases, speed limits of a road are set giving priority to the slow moving vehicles and ignoring the faster quartile of drivers. However, it is seen over the last one decade that increasing the speed limit does not necessarily mean an increase in the number of accidents. In fact, it is the reverse. In the last few decades, the safety features of the car, road conditions and road signs have improved a lot, and that has helped reduce the number of fatalities. Statistics show that some countries with higher speed limits have less number of accidents than the United States. Speed limit should be approached in a completely different way in this era of technology. Currently, the law enforcement officers are equipped with better technological gears to detect dangerous driving on the road. They should concentrate less on over speeding and more on dangerous driving practice. Also, the speed limit laws should be dynamic. It is irrational to have a single speed limit on a road. The speed limit should be dynamic and should be changed according to the traffic, road condition, visibility and weather condition.

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