

MINUTES  
**HOUSE TRANSPORTATION & DEFENSE COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** Wednesday, January 18, 2012  
**TIME:** 1:30 P.M.  
**PLACE:** Room EW40  
**MEMBERS:** Chairman Palmer, Vice Chairman Ellsworth, Representative(s) Wood(35), Smith(24), Bedke, Wills, Hart, Nonini, Hagedorn, Bateman, Henderson, Nasset, Ringo, King, Killen  
**ABSENT/  
EXCUSED:** None  
**GUESTS:** Mollie McCarty, Greg Loragan, and Paul Steinman, Idaho Transportation Department (ITD); First Lieutenant Thad Peterson, Michigan State Police, Caitlin Lavele, Gallatin.

**Vice Chairman Ellsworth** called the meeting to order at 1:30 P.M.

**Paul Steinman**, ITD, Chief of Operations, introduced **First Lieutenant Thad Peterson** from Michigan State Police to present Michigan's Speed Limit Study.

**First Lieutenant Thad Peterson**, representing Michigan State Police, began by saying that speed limit reform is a matter of education. Most speed limits have been in the upward direction yet fatalities are falling. Michigan has 1 fatality per 100 million vehicle miles driven. Idaho has 1.3 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles driven. Some reasons for this are speed limit establishment, vehicle technology, roadway design, impaired driving enforcement, and safety belt laws. He said that speed kills but speeding doesn't. We tend to drive at our comfort level. We all speed on a daily basis. So we, as law enforcement, may not be changing the speed on a road but we change the speed limit. Inappropriate speed limits cause non-compliance. When speed limits are set correctly which means those actually driven by motorists, compliance rates are maximized, and crash rates are minimized. Crashes that do occur are not as severe. Looking at a logarithmic graph, the lowest point is a little above average speed. This is the lowest risk speed for getting involved in a crash. Eight-five percent speed is the speed that 85% of the vehicles are traveling. 85% speed is the lowest risk speed. Ideal speed is set at the maximum limit. This provides the lowest speed variance between vehicles and thus provides the lowest crash numbers. It provides optimum enforceability, and it is the safest speed limit. Finally, public perception is that a higher speed limit will make the roadway less safe, because the public falsely thinks the actual travel speeds will increase. Similarly, perception is that a lower speed limit will make roadways safer, because the public falsely think the actual travel speeds will decrease. The reality is that lowering speed limits does not change travel speeds. So we need speed limit reform; we need to set speed limits at the 85% speed which drivers feel safe driving on a particular road. Speed limits too low just cause non-compliance, ticketing, and more crashes.

It was asked if average speeds are creeping up when speed limits are set at the 85%. **First Lt. Peterson** answered that they have looked at this issue for several years and see no appreciable change. Another question asked if there is demographic that follows the speed limit. First Lt. Peterson said they have not found any consistent group. When asked what prompted the visit with First Lt. Peterson, **Paul Steinman** explained that this was as result of a meeting between ITD and **Senator Hammond** and Idaho State Police (ISP) to make sure we have the proper reform in Idaho. As a department ISP wants to make sure our partners are on board. ITD wanted a national perspective so First Lt. Peterson was asked to come out and share Michigan's story.

The committee asked if there are any updates since the advent of cell phones and texting. **First Lt. Peterson** responded that he does not believe there is a current study to measure speeds since the advent of cell phones. However, even with the number of cell phones increasing, fatality rates are going down.

The committee asked about having one speed for multi-axle vehicles and another speed limit for cars. **First Lt. Peterson** responded that they have looked at this and concluded that getting rid of 55 m.p.h. for trucks will have a positive effect.

The committee then asked about intermittent work zone times when there are no workers, should the speed limits signs come down. And, secondly, when you are approaching a work zone how many miles in advance should you slow down. **First Lt. Peterson** said we those transition zones have been stretched too far. When the zones are shortened, the workers remarked that drivers seemed more alert to work zones.

The committee asked if the Michigan study had looked at Montana because they used to have signs that read "reasonable and prudent." **First Lt. Peterson** replied that he did not have any good data from that era, but understood that it was struck down as unconstitutional and Montana's crash rates went up.

**Greg Laragan** ITD, Section Manager Highway Operations began by speaking on differential speeds. He pointed out that before 1974 states had the right to set speeds. Idaho's speed limits on freeways were then 70 mph. There were also 419 miles of non-interstate roads that were set at 70 mph. To date, we still have not changed those road speed limits back from national mandate of 55 mph to the speeds prior to 1974. Mr Laragan went on to explain that although the studies were Michigan specific, Idaho has experienced the same kind of phenomenon. Relative to changing speeds, you don't get the change in safety, but in compliance.

The committee noted that Idaho's speeds limits are set by statute, so there would be no deviation. **Greg Laragan** answered that the maximum is set by statute but individual sections are set by engineering study and can be set lower. Another question was asked about whether or not towns comply to the engineering study. Mr. Laragan said that there is a separate piece of Idaho Code that deals with cities, which have authority to set speeds within their jurisdiction. ITD does a study and gives their recommendations. If they don't agree, they have to take official city action and go on record against ITD's recommendations. Then ITD reports back to them every year.

When questioned if the engineering study considers wildlife, horseback riders and pedestrians in their studies. **Mr. Laragan** said they don't double count the subconscious things the driver sees. If it is apparent to the motorist, they slow down; but if there are things hidden from the motorist, those things are taken into consideration. Mr. Laragan also said he did not believe that school zones were part of their decisions. The responsibility for school zones lie locally. The state does not interfere.

**ADJOURN:** There being no further business to come before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 2:45 P.M.

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Representative Ellsworth  
Chair

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Jane Clark  
Secretary