

CITY COUNCIL AGENDA TOPIC

Introduction to the Safe Speeds Bellevue program, a coordinated city effort to ensure safe speeds on all Bellevue streets.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**DIRECTION**

Staff is seeking direction from Council to begin outreach on the Safe Speeds Bellevue program and to prepare an ordinance to reduce the speed limit on four arterial streets that will be used to evaluate the staff recommended “Target Speed” approach. The speed limit change for the four evaluation corridors would occur in summer 2025.

RECOMMENDATION

Direct staff to initiate outreach on Safe Speeds Bellevue and to prepare an ordinance that will change Bellevue City Code 11.32 Speed to lower the speed limit on the four evaluation arterial streets.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

The new Safe Speeds Bellevue program was created to support the City Council-adopted Vision Zero initiative, which aims to eliminate traffic deaths and serious injuries on Bellevue streets by 2030.

Through this study session staff will present the approach to identifying possible speed limit changes and the outreach that will be performed to gather public input.

Safe Speeds and Vision Zero

Safe Speeds is one of the four pillars of Bellevue’s Safe Systems approach adopted by Council in 2020. The Safe Speeds pillar of the Safe Systems approach recognizes the direct connection between vehicle speed and the severity of injuries when crashes occur. Streets in Bellevue that have a posted speed limit of 30 mph or more represent only 25% of the total street mileage but account for 88% of crashes where a person is killed or seriously injured. Research shows that lowering speed limits is effective at reducing vehicle speeds and at decreasing the quantity and severity of crashes.

Target Speeds are Safe Speeds

Best practices from American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO), and Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) recommend determining safe speed limits for streets using a “Target Speed” approach. Target Speeds are defined as the highest speed people should drive vehicles on a street based on the street’s context. “Context” considers two primary factors defined by NACTO’s *City Limits* guide: “Conflict Density” and “Activity Level.”

Conflict Density is how frequently potential conflicts arise between different road users. It uses “Modal Mixing” and “Crossing Point Density” to evaluate the level of potential conflict. Modal Mixing looks at how people using different travel modes—like people walking, rolling, bicycling and driving—interact with each other. Generally, higher modal mixing supports lower speed limits. Crossing Point Density measures how many opportunities there are for people to cross or enter the street where people are driving. Generally, more crossing points support lower speed limits.

Activity Level describes how active a street is currently or is expected to be in the near future. It considers how many people are walking and rolling along the street, what types of public spaces are next to the street, current or future bike routes, transit usage and curbside demand (ex. parking, delivery drivers). Generally, more activity supports lower speed limits.

The goal of a Target Speed approach is to minimize the risk of a person being killed or seriously injured on a street. This approach considers how Conflict Density and Activity Level of a street contributes to the risk of a crash occurring and then recommends a safe speed limit that will appropriately minimize the crash risk and the severity of injuries to people when a crash does occur. The first step towards implementing Safe Speeds Bellevue is to develop an approach for determining a target speed for each 30+ mph street.

The study session presentation will show how Conflict Density and Activity Level would be used to identify the target speed for each arterial. Target speed limits are proposed to be between 20-35 mph in Bellevue. According to NACTO, setting a maximum Target Speed for urban arterial streets of 35 mph is critical for safety; higher Target Speeds than 35 mph are only appropriate outside of urban and suburban areas where people are unlikely to walk, roll or bike.

Lower Speed Limits Reduce Speeds

Previous speed limit reductions in Seattle and Bellevue have shown that lowering speed limits is an effective way to achieve safe speeds. When Seattle lowered most arterial street speed limits to 25 mph (from 30 mph) in 2020 and increased speed limit sign density, they achieved an 18% reduction in annual injury crashes, a 2.5 mph reduction in median speeds, and a 54% reduction in people driving 40 mph or faster. Similarly, when Bellevue reduced local street speed limits to 20 mph in the Eastgate neighborhood, there was a 24% reduction in people driving 30 mph or faster.

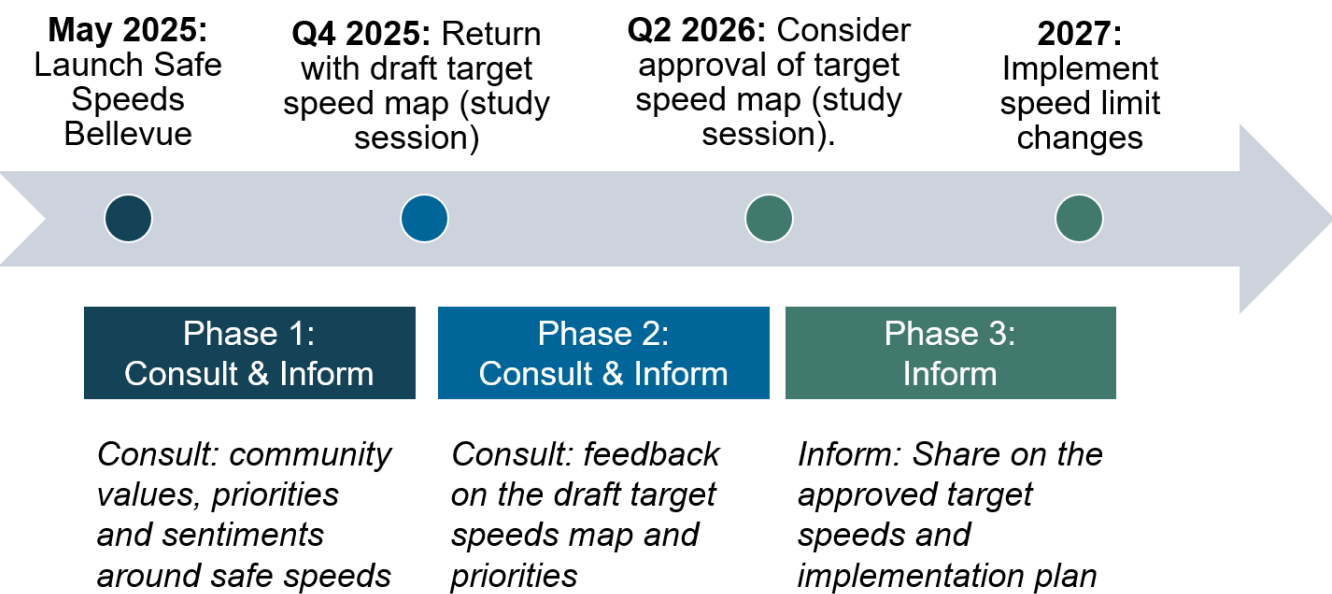
To further evaluate the effectiveness of reducing speed limits to the Target Speed, staff are seeking direction to first implement Target Speeds on four Bellevue streets and increase the density of speed limit signs. If approved, these speed limit changes would be implemented in the summer of this year.

The four evaluation streets have been selected in different parts of Bellevue to represent a variety of contexts including proximity to schools and popular bike routes and where staff have received community requests to lower speeds for safety. These streets include: 124th Avenue Southeast - Southeast 38th Street in Factoria; Northup Way from 108th Avenue Northeast to 120th Avenue Northeast in Northwest Bellevue; Village Park Drive in Lakemont; and Northeast 40th Street in Bridle Trails. Before and after studies will be conducted to measure the effectiveness of the lower speed limits.

Outreach and Council Process

Outreach for Safe Speeds Bellevue is proposed to be conducted in three phases, and staff will report back to the City Council and confirm direction prior to initiating the subsequent phase of outreach. To

ensure that a diverse cross-section of the Bellevue community is both consulted and informed, staff will employ a wide variety of virtual and in-person outreach strategies.



The launch of Safe Speeds Bellevue will include the deployment of new speed limits on the four evaluation corridors noted and the first phase of outreach on Safe Speeds Bellevue. The primary goals of this phase are to introduce the project, clearly communicate its objectives and consult the community on their values, priorities and level of support for achieving safe speeds on Bellevue streets. Staff will publish information on a project webpage translated into Bellevue’s top languages, on social media and in “It’s Your City,” “Neighborhood News” and other city publications. Real-time opportunities for the public to engage with the project will include tabling at Bellevue Family 4th, farmers markets, community association briefings and other events. The community will also be able to provide feedback via a comment box on the project webpage and an online survey. Staff will also seek feedback by engaging a community panel on safe speeds.

In the fourth quarter of 2025, staff will summarize outreach findings and return to Council to report on community feedback and the results of the before and after study performed on the four evaluation corridors. Learnings from this effort will be used to develop a map of recommended Target Speeds for all streets with a posted speed limit of 30 mph or more. If Council approves the recommended speeds, staff will begin the second phase of outreach to seek feedback on the Target Speeds map and implementation plan, confirming that Target Speeds and implementation priorities reflect community values.

In the second quarter of 2026, staff will incorporate findings from the second phase of outreach into a final map of recommended Target Speeds and an implementation strategy. These recommendations will be presented to Council for approval and future design and implementation. Staff will continue outreach to the community during and after implementation to ensure the public is aware and informed of the speed limit changes and the need for safe speeds.

If approved, further speed limit changes will be made starting in 2027. As we continue to evaluate the performance of the new speed limits, we will use funding in the Vision Zero Safe Speeds program to implement projects that further encourage safe speeds through use of arterial traffic calming techniques identified in the city's Speed Management Plan. The Vision Zero Safe Speeds program in the adopted Capital Improvement Program (CIP) provides \$1.1 million per year beginning in 2027.

POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

Policy Impact

The City Council Vision, which guides Bellevue's policy and budget, supports this work by identifying a "safe and efficient transportation system" as one of six Strategic Target Areas. This target area reinforces the City's commitment to "eliminate fatal and serious injury collisions through the application of the Safe System Approach" (Objective 3.2, Bellevue City Council Vision). Furthermore, this work is supported by several Comprehensive Plan policies, particularly those that direct the City to "strive to eliminate traffic deaths and serious injuries on Bellevue streets by 2030" (TR-58) and to "assess arterial speed limits and address concerns related to safety through appropriate speed limits, countermeasures and other techniques" (TR-56).

Fiscal Impact

Commencing community outreach will have minimal fiscal impact except for staff time to develop outreach mailers, websites and communication. If Council approves the speed limit reduction on the four evaluation streets, design and implementation will be funded by the Vision Zero Safe Speeds Program (CIP Plan No. PW-R-219).

OPTIONS

1. Direct staff to initiate outreach on Safe Speeds Bellevue and to prepare an ordinance that will change Bellevue City Code 11.32 Speed to lower the speed limit on the four evaluation arterial streets.
2. Provide alternative direction to staff.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Map of four evaluation streets
- B. Map of Bellevue streets with a current speed limit of 30 mph or higher
- C. CIP Project Description (PW-R-219)
- D. Proposed amendments to Chapter 11.32 of the Bellevue City Code

AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY

City of Bellevue Speed Management Plan