

CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION

Proposed steps for pursuing a citywide local speed limit reduction project to reduce the speed limit on local streets from 25 mph to 20 mph.

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DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL

DIRECTION

Staff is seeking direction from Council on proposed steps to engage the community, prepare a draft ordinance, design, and implement a citywide speed limit reduction project that would change the default speed limit on local streets from 25 mph to 20 mph.

RECOMMENDATION

Direct staff to commence community outreach and prepare a draft ordinance to lower local street speed limits to 20 mph to be brought back for Council consideration at a future meeting.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

Speeding on local streets is the top concern heard from residents regarding traffic safety in Bellevue. To respond to community concerns about speeding, staff employ countermeasures from a robust toolkit (e.g. speed humps, radar feedback signs, traffic circles) to bring down vehicle speeds; staff frequently investigate new/emerging interventions to be considered as part of the traffic calming toolkit. Based on the positive results of 20 mph speed limits implemented in three Bellevue neighborhoods, staff seek to lower the speed limit on most local streets from 25 mph to 20 mph. A lower speed limit supports the City's Vision Zero effort and represents a culture shift for residents in how speeds are managed on local streets: *safety starts on your street*.

How speeds and speed limits are managed on Bellevue's streets is generally dependent on whether the street is classified as a local or an arterial street. Local streets along with collector arterials have speed limits of 20 or 25 mph and are managed by the City's long-standing traffic calming program. Arterial speeds and speed limits are guided by the recently completed Speed Management Plan and the City's *Speed Limit Setting Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)*. The focus of this project is to reduce speed limits on local streets. Local streets are designed primarily to provide access to abutting land uses and carry local traffic to collector arterials (Attachment A).

Lower vehicle speeds have a direct relationship to safety for people walking: as a pedestrian, the chance of surviving a vehicle crash is exponentially higher if hit by vehicle traveling 20 mph compared to 30 or 40 mph. As such, a lower speed limit will help to make streets safer and more comfortable for people walking and biking in the neighborhood.

Lowering local street speed limits to 20 mph is an emerging best practice and has been implemented in

cities such as Renton, Seattle, Tacoma, Portland, Bainbridge Island and other agencies both locally and nationally. The call for lowering speed limits on residential streets in Bellevue has been amplified in recent years by Bellevue residents. In response, from 2020-2022, three neighborhoods in Bellevue have received 20 mph speed limits: Surrey Downs (2020), East Bellevue Greenway along the 165th/166th Avenues corridor (2021), and a portion of Eastgate near Tyee Middle School (2022). Each of these projects that lowered the speed limit—essentially only sign change projects—reduced high-end speeding (30+ mph). Eastgate, the largest 20 mph zone to date, experienced a 19% reduction in high-end speeding. Lowering speed limits on residential streets has proven to be a popular intervention by Bellevue residents. A public evaluation survey of the East Bellevue Demonstration Greenway showed most survey respondents supported lowering the speed limit to 20 mph, and it was the most popular intervention of the entire demonstration greenway project. In Eastgate, 59% of survey respondents think the lower speed limit enhances the overall safety in the neighborhood (compared to 28% who do not).

Implementing a citywide local speed limit reduction will include:

- replacement of all existing 25 mph (~300) speed limit signs on most local streets with 20 mph speed limit sign along with replacing sign posts that do not meet City design standards (~150);
- installation of additional 20 mph speed limit signs, as funds allow, on corridors where additional reinforcement of the speed limit is warranted;
- replacement of existing “25 MPH” pavement marking legends—made of plastic and burned into asphalt roadways—with “20 MPH” pavement marking legends;
- outreach and engagement;
- evaluation of effectiveness.

Transportation Department staff are coordinating with the Police Department to ensure enforcement staff are aware of the change. Further, the City's Neighborhood Traffic Safety Program will continue to invest in physical traffic calming such as speed humps and traffic circles, among others, to further reduce speeds.

While lowering the speed limit alone will not automatically encourage all motorists to drive the speed limit, a lower speed limit represents a shift in our traffic safety culture in Bellevue. A lower speed limit communicates to people driving that lower speeds are vital to support safe streets and that it takes collective action and personal responsibility to meet our goal of eliminating serious injuries and fatalities on city streets by 2030. Finally, focused education and encouragement to drive the reduced speed limit is a goal of this project.

That said, a citywide change to 20 mph will be a big change for the community so multiple Council touchpoints are expected along with robust community outreach. Estimated Council touchpoints and project timeline include:



The following outreach activities are envisioned to ensure the entire City is aware of this project and to provide opportunities to answer questions about what a lower speed limit means: Project website (translated into top languages) with FAQs, recorded webinars, *It's Your City* article (every household in Bellevue), Neighborhood News updates (2500 subscribers), Transportation Department Listserv (3600 subscribers), engage existing networks (e.g. Bellevue Essentials alumni, Network on Aging), briefings to our neighborhood associations, interactive map, social media, and more. Upon launch of the speed limit change, additional education, excitement and awareness efforts of the speed limit change will be developed to ensure the community is aware of the change.

This project is envisioned to be a major implementation step of advancing the “Safe Speed” pillar of the Vision Zero Safe System framework. While this project advances safe speeds on local streets, the Transportation Department will be advancing the review of arterial speed limits throughout the City later this year. That effort will build on the recently completed *Speed Management Plan* which provides a comprehensive framework for managing arterial speeds.

POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

Policy Impact

In 2015, Council adopted Resolution No. 9035 recognizing Vision Zero and that death and serious injury on City streets is unacceptable and preventable. Building on the framework provided in the Resolution, in 2016 Council passed Ordinance No. 6334 adopting three Vision Zero amendments into the City's Comprehensive Plan, including:

- TR-61.2: Develop a programmatic approach to Vision Zero that integrates components of Education, Encouragement, Enforcement, Engineering, Equity and Evaluation.

Since being incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan, there has been substantial involvement from the Transportation Commission and Council, including the June 2020 approval of Resolution No. 9769 which adopted a Safe Systems approach to move Bellevue towards Vision Zero. A Vision Zero Strategic Plan was approved in 2020 by the City Manager, further directing staff to create annual Vision Zero Action Plans (VZAP). The 2023 VZAP includes an action to “Continue expanding neighborhood slow zone program while advancing Citywide efforts to implement a local street speed limit reduction policy reducing speed limits on local streets to 20 mph.”

State law allows local agencies to lower the speed limit without an engineering study if they have developed procedures regarding establishing a maximum speed limit (see RCW 46.61.415(3)(b)) which the Transportation Department has done. The primary mechanism to alter city speed limits is via

ordinance to change BCC 11.32 Speed. Advancing a lower speed limit on local streets is consistent with the following policy in the Transportation Element of the Comprehensive Plan:

- TR-153: Employ traffic calming measures to slow vehicular travel speed along residential streets and to reduce the volume of cut-through traffic.

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 local streets, design and implementation will be paid for out of the safety allocation of the Neighborhood Safety and Connectivity portion of levy approved by voters in 2016.

OPTIONS

1. Direct staff to commence community outreach and prepare a draft ordinance to lower local speed limit to 20 mph to be brought back for Council consideration at a future meeting.
2. Provide alternative direction to staff.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Vicinity Map
- B. CIP Project Description (PW-R-199)

AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY

N/A