



TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Arlington Planning Department, 730 Mass Ave,
Arlington MA, c/o Laura Wiener

To: Board of Selectmen, Arlington, MA

From: Transportation Advisory Committee

Subject: Local Speed Limits and Local Speed Safety Zones

Reference: Board of Selectmen Request Dated November 28, 2016

Date: February 8, 2017

Introduction

On November 7, 2016, new state Speed Limit Regulations under Chapter 90, Sections 17 and 18, signed by Governor Baker became effective. Sections 193 and 194 of Chapter 218 of the Acts of 2016 create two new sections to Chapter 90 of the Massachusetts General Laws (MGL).

Section 193 allows municipalities to opt-in to MGL c. 90 s. 17C, in order to reduce the statutory speed limit from 30 MPH to 25 MPH on any or all town-owned roadways within a thickly settled or business district. Towns are required to notify MassDOT of these changes.

Section 194 creates MGL c. 90 s.18B, allowing municipalities to establish regulatory 20 MPH safety zones. Since this creates a regulatory speed limit, the MUTCD requires an engineering study prior to the establishment of the safety zone and it should conform to the MassDOT Procedures for Speed Zoning.

A working group of the Arlington Transportation Committee (TAC) was formed to evaluate the potential impacts and feasibility of authorizing the new state Speed Limit Regulations in Arlington. Working Group members include Jeff Maxtutis (Lead), Seth Federspiel, Officer Corey Rateau and Victor Rivas.

The information provided in this Memorandum is based on the Information and Guidance letter, October 17, 2016 from Neil Boudreau, State Traffic Engineer, MassDOT and Frequently Asked Questions regarding the legislation and speed zoning.

Evaluation

Statutory Speed Limits. Statutory speed limits exist in the absence of Special Speed Regulations and official posted speed limits. MGL c. 90 s.17 requires that drivers operate motor vehicles at a rate of speed that is no greater than reasonable and proper with regard to the use of the road and safety of the public. In thickly settled or business districts, 30 MPH is the designated reasonable speed. This 30 MPH speed limit currently applies to most roadways in Arlington under Town jurisdiction. All, or nearly all, roadways in Arlington are in a thickly settled or business district.

Changing the statutory speed limit from 30 MPH to 25 MPH would not affect roadways with a regulatory speed limit. A regulatory speed limit has a Special Speed Regulation and posted speed limit signs. There are approximately two dozen roadways under Town jurisdiction that have a Special Speed Regulation in Arlington (see attached list). These Special Speed Regulations were authorized by the Town of Arlington and the Registrar of Motor Vehicles between 1972 and 1979. There are also roadways in town that are under State jurisdiction (Routes 2 (Concord Turnpike), 2A, 3, Mystic Valley Parkway (DCR),) that would not be affected by changing the statutory speed limit.

An engineering study is not required to establish a statutory speed limit and statutory speed limits do not include posted signs on individual roadways. Municipalities that opt-in to Section 193 of Chapter 218 of the Acts of 2016 on a town-wide basis may post "Thickly Settled Speed Limit 25 Townwide Unless Otherwise Posted" signs at the town boundaries (see figure below). MassDOT recommends that if a town opts-in to this legislation, it is done for the entire town to avoid potential confusion to drivers.

There are approximately 16 main roadway gateway locations on the town border entering Arlington. The new sign shown below should be placed at each of these locations if the Town adopts the reduced statutory speed limit. There are some minor roadways on the Lexington and Winchester town lines that may not need to be signed.

Transportation Advisory Committee Members:

Wayne Chouinard, Seth Federspiel, Melissa Laube, Jeff Maxtutis, Marjorie Moores, Howard Muise, Officer Corey Rateau, Victor Rivas, Scott Smith, and Laura Wiener

Web site; www.arlingtonma.gov/tac



Because the new legislation has only been recently enacted, and adopted by only a few communities (Boston, Cambridge, Somerville); it is difficult to estimate how changing the statutory speed limit from 30 MPH to 25 MPH on town-owned roads will impact vehicle speeds. At a minimum, it will make motorists aware that the prima facie speed limit in town is 25 MPH on roadways without posted speed limits. It may also help to change driver behavior. With enforcement by the Police Department, the change to 25 MPH has the potential to lower traffic speed and consequently improve safety on many roadways in town.

Safety Zone Speed Limits. Safety Zone speed limits are the only regulatory speed limits (besides School Zones) that municipalities can adopt without prior approval from MassDOT. Safety Zone speed limits must be set at 20 MPH and are intended to be used in areas where vulnerable road users are likely to be present. Such areas include parks and playgrounds, senior housing, medical facilities, high schools, higher education centers and daycare facilities. Safety Zones should not be used in place of School Zones on streets adjacent to schools with grades 1 through 8. Safety Zones should be at least one-quarter mile long.

Regulatory speed limit signs are required to conform to the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), per MGL c. 85 s. 2. Therefore, an engineering study must be performed to validate the posted signage for Safety Zones. Towns are responsible for modifying their Municipal Traffic Code to reflect locations of all Safety Zones prior to posting signage.

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Recommendations

The Arlington TAC recommends that the Board of Selectmen adopt a reduction in the statutory speed limit from 30 MPH to 25 MPH on all town-owned roadways within a thickly settled or business district. The Town is required to notify MassDOT of these changes.

The recommendation includes the Town posting “Thickly Settled Speed Limit 25 Townwide Unless Otherwise Posted” signs at main roadways (arterials and collectors) at the town boundaries. There are approximately 16 gateway locations that could potentially require a new sign. The cost to purchase 16 signs is approximately \$1,500.

The Arlington TAC voted unanimously to approve these recommendations on February 8, 2017.

Please contact us with any questions or comments.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeff Maxtutis – Working Group Lead
Howard Muise – TAC Chair

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