



SCHOOL BUS SPEED LIMITS

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QUESTION

What led to the 50 mph speed limit for school buses and what would be the ramifications of increasing it?

SUMMARY

State law generally limits school buses to a maximum speed of 50 mph on divided, limited access roads (highways) and to 40 mph on other roads. Before the legislature adopted the law in 1967, school buses were limited by regulation to 40 mph on all state highways.

Proponents of increasing the maximum 50 mph speed limit on limited access highways say it would allow school buses to keep up with the faster flow of traffic, thus reducing the possibility of accidents if, for example, following vehicles suddenly and unexpectedly slow down or change lanes.

The National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services (NASDPTS) opposes higher school bus speed limits, saying that (1) the lower school bus speed limit does not increase the risk of a crash and (2) injuries in vehicle crashes become more severe at higher speeds.

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Speed Limit Law

By law, school buses must travel "at a safe rate of speed, consistent with the volume of traffic, intersections, curves, railway crossings and any other condition requiring special caution." The law sets the maximum speed for school buses at 50 mph on divided, limited access highways and 40 mph on all other highways, "or, where highway signs indicate lower speeds, ... such posted speed limits." A violation is an infraction (CGS § [14-281a](#)).

The legislature enacted the law (PA 324) in 1967, increasing by 10 mph on divided, limited access highways the school bus speed limit set by regulation.

Impact of Increasing the Speed Limit

State Police Captain Walter Stecko, testifying in favor of the bill that became PA 324 at an April 19, 1967 Transportation Committee public hearing, said state police recognized a “need to move traffic along, as fast and smoothly and uniformly as possible.” He said uniformity of traffic flow should be encouraged.

(Several other people spoke in favor of the measure, but did not elaborate. There was no debate in either the House or Senate.)

NASDPTS, in a 2000 position paper on school bus speed limits, concluded that school buses should operate at the speed limits that existed before December 8, 1995, when the federal government allowed states to set their own speed limits (or none at all). NASDPTS said there was “ample evidence” that requiring school buses to travel at slower speeds did not pose a safety risk to the buses or other vehicles. Also, it said, traveling at slower speeds reduces (1) potential crash severity and (2) fuel consumption. It argued that driving at higher speeds to shorten travel time “by a few minutes” may not be worth the increased risk. According to NASDPTS, this position remains current.

RESOURCE

National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation Services, *Position Paper: Speed Limits for School Buses*, April 2000. Last accessed September 4, 2014. <http://www.nasdpts.org/Documents/Paper-SpeedLimit.pdf>.

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