

Strategies for Reducing Speeding in Residential Areas

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Issue

This report provides (1) an overview of speed reduction measures, often referred to as "traffic calming" and (2) examples of traffic calming initiatives implemented in other states, cities, and regions.

Summary

According to the Federal Highway Administration's (FHA) [Institute of Transportation Engineers](#), traffic calming refers to measures designed to reduce traffic speed and accident numbers, discourage motorists from cutting through residential areas, and promote pedestrian and cycle use.

Traffic calming measures can include physical changes to streets, such as roundabouts, speed humps, and bulb-outs. Other measures affect how drivers perceive the roadway (e.g., painting lines on the road to make lanes appear narrower or planting trees or shrubs along roads). Traffic calming can also include driver education and speed limit enforcement programs.

Certain states, cities, and regions have incorporated various traffic calming measures into broader initiatives to reduce speeding and improve pedestrian safety in residential areas. Among other things, these initiatives have included neighborhood greenways, traffic calming programs and guides, pedestrian safety programs and speed limit legislation.

Traffic Calming Measures

According to the FHWA's Institute of Transportation Engineers, [traffic calming measures](#) include, among other things:

- bulb-outs (horizontal extensions of sidewalk into the street resulting in a narrower roadway section);
- chicanes (changes in the alignment of lanes);
- median islands (raised islands along the street centerline that narrow the travel lanes);
- roundabouts (raised islands in unsignalized intersections around which traffic circulates); and
- speed humps (raised areas of pavement typically 12 to 14 feet in length, often placed in a series).

Examples of Traffic Calming Initiatives

Neighborhood Greenways

Portland's [neighborhood greenways](#) are residential streets designed to improve conditions for walking and bicycling. The city adopted a 20 miles per hour speed limit in its neighborhood greenways along with additional operational performance guidelines to enhance conditions for people walking and bicycling (e.g., providing at least 50 opportunities an hour for cyclists and pedestrians to cross busy streets). It also installed speed bumps and traffic diverters to prevent drivers from using the greenways as cut-through streets and keep drivers on the main roads.

Burlington, Vermont's [neighborhood greenways](#) use several traffic calming measures to make streets safer for pedestrians. Measures include signage, medians, and signal detections at busy intersections and pavement markings to indicate potential conflict zones to both pedestrians and drivers.

Traffic Calming Programs and Guides

In 2010, the town of Madison, Connecticut developed a [Traffic Calming Program](#) in response to community concerns about traffic speeds within residential neighborhoods. The program process begins when (1) a neighborhood or organized group asks the Board of Police Commissioners to investigate a traffic related concern within a neighborhood or (2) the

Board of Selectman, Board of Police Commissioners, or Board of Education identifies a traffic related concern. The commissioners will forward the request to the Department of Public Works (DPW) and Engineering for an initial screening to determine if traffic calming measures are a potential solution. If the neighborhood meets the eligibility criteria, DPW and Engineering will notify the commissioners, and the commissioners will inform the neighborhood that a traffic calming study will be initiated.

Virginia developed a [Traffic Calming Guide for Neighborhood Streets](#), aimed at reducing vehicle speeds without restricting access, and alleviating cut-through traffic and through-truck traffic. It provides guidance and procedures for local communities to pursue traffic calming on Virginia Department of Transportation maintained streets in their neighborhoods. Community residents, homeowners associations, or civic associations can initiate a request for a traffic calming study. County or town staff will work with the community to conduct the process and if approved, coordinate the plan.

Pedestrian Safety Programs

In 2012, Central Florida launched the [Best Foot Forward](#) initiative for pedestrian safety to get drivers to reduce their speed and yield to pedestrians in marked crosswalks in order to reduce the number of driver versus pedestrian collisions. The initiative applies low-cost engineering, community education, and high-visibility enforcement. Efforts have included installing signs at certain crosswalks, informing residents of driver yield laws, and using a system of escalating consequences to drivers who fail to yield to pedestrians.

Speed Limit Legislation

In 2016, Massachusetts enacted a law that allows the city council, board of selectmen, park commissioners, or traffic commission or traffic director of a city or town to establish a 25 miles per hour speed limit on any roadway inside a thickly settled or business district on any road that isn't a state highway. A district is considered thickly settled if houses are closer than 200 feet together ([Mass. Gen. Laws Ch. 90 § 17C](#)).

Indiana passed legislation in 2015 allowing localities that are not urban districts to establish a school zone limit of 20 miles per hour. Previously, a town or county not defined as an urban district was not allowed to establish a speed limit lower than 30 miles per hour ([Ind. Code § 9-21-5-6](#)).

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