

TRAFFIC AND SAFETY
Frequently Asked Questions

Hinsdale Police Department



TRAFFIC AND SAFETY FAQ

Hinsdale Police Department

Q. CAN THE VILLAGE POST A LOWER SPEED LIMIT ON MY STREET TO SLOW DOWN TRAFFIC?

- A. Speeding is a problem that plagues many of Hinsdale's streets. As such, the Police Department works closely with the community to educate drivers and enforce speed laws in many areas of town. The police use a variety of enforcement techniques that include use of the STEALTH radar, SMART (Speed Monitoring) Trailer, the C.A.R.E. Program, and selective enforcement by the patrol division.

Some widely held misconceptions are that speed limit signs lower the speed of traffic, reduce accidents and increase safety. Studies show most drivers pay little attention to speed limit signs, and drive at a speed that they consider comfortable to the roadway. A driver's speed is more influenced by the appearance of the roadway and the prevailing traffic conditions than by the posted speed limit. In addition, research studies show there is no direct relationship between posted speed limits and the frequency of accidents. As a result, posting appropriate speed limits establishes a steady flow of traffic and simplifies enforcement.

The Village of Hinsdale has posted speed limits that range from 20 to 35 miles per hour. These speeds are based on Traffic Engineering Surveys that take into consideration the roadway conditions, accident records, and the speed of drivers. The maximum speed limit for any passenger vehicle is 55 miles per hour.

All speed limits below 55 are either set by the Illinois Vehicle Code (e.g. 25 miles per hour in business and residential areas), or have been established through a Traffic Engineering Survey. The speed limit is not always posted, but drivers are required to know to drive at a safe speed; as defined by the Illinois Vehicle Code. In Hinsdale, the speed limit is 25 mph unless otherwise posted.

The Village of Hinsdale must and meet the standards of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control to alter speed limits within the Village.

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Q. WHAT ARE THE CRITERIA FOR PUTTING IN A STOP OR YIELD SIGN?

- A. Many people request stop signs to be installed for the purpose of lowering speeds or improving intersection safety. However, the true purpose of a stop sign is solely to assign right-of-way at an intersection. Various research studies indicate that stop signs do not reduce the overall speed of traffic. As such, when stop signs are installed strictly for the purpose of slowing traffic, the speeds are reduced in the vicinity of the stop sign, but tend to be higher between the intersections as drivers try to make up for delays. The overuse of stop signs may cause general contempt for all traffic control devices, often with tragic consequences. Additionally, installing a traffic signal at a low-volume intersection can significantly increase crashes and delays.

There are two types of stop conditions at any intersection: **Two-way Stop** (only the minor street is stopped); and **Multi-way Stop** (both streets, i.e. all four legs, are required to stop). Stop signs should not be viewed as a cure-all for solving all traffic safety problems, but when used properly stop signs are a useful traffic control device, and enhance safety for all roadway users.

Too many signs can lead to ineffectiveness. Studies have shown that when stop signs are placed at intersections where they are not really needed, motorists become careless about stopping. Installing traffic signs where they are not needed can also create traffic congestion, add travel time, and frustrate drivers, and these drivers may become impatient and make unsafe maneuvers.

The use of signs and signals should be restricted to locations where they will be effective. Signs and signals are only effective and should only be used when they meet the following four requirements: (1) fulfill a need, (2) convey a clear, simple meaning, (3) command attention and respect, and (4) give adequate time for drivers to respond.

The Village of Hinsdale is required by law to comply with Federal and State guidelines when installing traffic control devices such as stop signs. For example, multi-way stop signs are installed at an intersection only after a Traffic Engineering study is completed which considers accident history, traffic volumes, speed of traffic, and sign distance problems. The Village of Hinsdale abides by the warrants for placement of traffic control signals as defined by the *Illinois Manual for Uniform Traffic Control Devices*.

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In Illinois, the following warrants must be met prior to installation of a **two-way** stop sign:

- a. *The intersection of a less important road with a main road where application of the normal right-of-way rule is unduly hazardous.*
- b. *A street entering a through highway or street*
- c. *An un-signalized intersection in a signalized area.*
- d. *Other intersections where a combination of high speed, restricted view, and serious accident record (defined by 5 or more collisions within a 12 month period) indicates a need for control by a stop sign.*

The following warrants must be met prior to the installation of a **Multi-way** stop sign:

- a. *Where traffic signals are going to be placed soon and the intersection needs a temporary solution to control the traffic.*
- b. *An intersection that has several crashes (5 or more correctable collisions in 12 months)*
- c. *When an intersection has the following traffic volumes: (a) the total volume of traffic entering the intersection from all approaches must average at least 500 vehicles per hour for any eight hours of an average day; (b) the combined vehicular and pedestrian volume that enters the intersection from the minor street must average at least 200 units per hour for the same eight hours, with an average delay to the minor street traffic of at least 30 seconds per vehicle during the maximum hour; (c) the 85th percentile approach speed (this is the speed at or below which 85 percent of the vehicles travel on a given roadway) of the major street traffic exceeds 40 miles per hour, and the minimum vehicular volume warrant is 70% of the above requirements.*

The following warrants must be met prior to the installation of a **Yield** sign:

- a. *On a minor road at the entrance to an intersection where it is necessary to assign right-of-way to the major road, but where a stop sign is not necessary at all times, and where the safe approach speed on the minor road exceeds 10 miles per hour.*
- b. *On the entrance ramp to an expressway where an acceleration ramp is not provided.*
- c. *Within an intersection with a divided highway, where a STOP sign is present at the entrance to the first roadway and further control is necessary at the entrance between the two roadways, and where the median width between the acceleration lane.*
- d. *At an intersection where a special problem exists and where an engineering study indicates the problem to be susceptible to correction by use of the YIELD sign.*

There are also locations where the use of stop signs should be avoided. Every time a stop sign is considered, a less restrictive method such as a yield sign should first be considered. Traffic accidents could be reduced, in some cases, with simple measures like improving visibility by prohibiting parking close to the intersection.

Unfortunately, there is no general solution to the problem of speeding traffic. Often times, the true problem stems mostly from drivers that live in the neighborhood. There will always be drivers that speed through residential areas, and it is important for residents in a neighborhood to be aware of this issue. The best answer the Police Department may provide is that parents should always be conscientious of their children when playing near streets and intersections. Children should be educated on street safety and this should continually be reinforced.

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Q. HOW DOES THE VILLAGE DECIDE WHERE TO PUT IN A TRAFFIC SIGNAL?

A. The purpose of a traffic signal is to assign right-of-way to opposing movements of traffic at an intersection. As such, it may be necessary to install a traffic signal if the traffic volume increases and four-way stop signs do not lessen problems. However, improperly placed traffic signals can cause an increase in traffic accidents, particularly rear end collisions. And, pedestrians can gain a false sense of security from crosswalks and red lights, which may result in an increase in pedestrian accidents.

Before installing a traffic signal at an intersection, traffic engineers have to evaluate the following questions:

1. Does the volume of vehicles entering an intersection create confusion or congestion?
2. Is there so much traffic on main streets that it may be dangerous for traffic on side streets to cross? Are accidents the result of this condition?
3. Is there an increasing demand for pedestrians to cross main streets?
4. Does the number of school children crossing a busy street create confusion, congestion, or hazardous conditions?
5. Will the installation of a signal reduce overall congestion?
6. Does the accident history indicate that a signal will reduce the number of accidents at an intersection?

Traffic engineers use national standards to evaluate an intersection that may need a traffic signal. Properly placing traffic signals will decrease accidents and improve traffic flow.

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Q. WON'T SPEED BUMPS SLOW TRAFFIC ON OUR STREETS?

- A. Speed bumps are not recognized by the State of Illinois as an official traffic control device, and as such the Village of Hinsdale does not use them on public streets.

Q. CAN MY NEIGHBORHOOD GET A "CHILDREN AT PLAY" SIGN POSTED?

- A. Parents who are concerned about the safety of their children sometimes request that the Village install "Children at Play" signs, believing that these signs will provide added protection to their children near roadways. However, studies have shown that posting "Children at Play" signs in residential areas does not reduce vehicle speeds or pedestrian accidents. In addition, the use of these signs creates a false sense of security in both parents and children.

Of particular concern is that "Children at Play" signs may suggest to children that it is acceptable to play in Village streets, which could lead to devastating results. And, in the case of a vehicle/pedestrian accident, the pedestrian always loses. It is important to teach children to respect moving vehicles and how to be a safe pedestrian. Most importantly, **children should not play in or near roadways.**

Q. CAN WE HAVE A CROSSWALK AT THIS INTERSECTION?

- A. Crosswalks can either be "marked" with painted lines of white or yellow, or left "unmarked" at an intersection.

The purpose of a "marked" crosswalk is to encourage pedestrians to use a particular crossing. Normally, crosswalks are "marked" at places where there is an abundance of pedestrian movement, at a signal, and where pedestrians cannot recognize a proper place to cross. However, if "marked" crosswalks are not frequently used by pedestrians, then drivers tend to forget that they exist. As a result, accidents can occur when pedestrians rely on crosswalks to provide them with a safe barrier from traffic.

As an added note.....National studies have shown that marked crosswalks actually increase the risk to pedestrians crossing the street. In these studies, it was found that pedestrians are given a false sense of security at "marked" crosswalks, and tend to blindly cross the street, trusting the crosswalk to keep them out of harm's way. It is important that pedestrians remain attentive and cautious of on-coming vehicles on a roadway before crossing a street, regardless of the presence, or lack of, a crosswalk.

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Q. HOW DOES THE POLICE DEPARTMENT ADDRESS PROBLEMS OF SPEEDING VEHICLES

- A. Upon receipt of a citizen concern about speeding vehicles, the police department first must determine if indeed there is a speeding problem. Determining if there is a problem is performed by the use of the STEALTH Radar. STEALTH radar is a speed-monitoring unit which is installed on a utility pole and contained in a metal box. The STEALTH radar is not visible to the motorist and a true indication of vehicle speeds can be obtained. In addition to speeds, the STEALTH will calculate the number of vehicles traveling bi-directionally and calculate the average speeds. The STEALTH is used for a period of at least 48-hours during the busiest travel days, Tues-Thurs.

If STEALTH results indicate that speeds within the 85th Percentile considerably exceed the posted speed limit, several methods of speed-reduction operations may be utilized. These include: SMART Trailer, Selective Enforcement, or the Community Assisted Radar Enforcement (C.A.R.E.) Program.

The SMART Trailer is a radar unit housed within a trailer containing the posted speed limit and a display which shows the motorist the speed at which they are currently traveling. The SMART Trailer logs the speeds and calculates average speeds and vehicle counts.

Selective Enforcement is the distribution of police manpower to a target location. Police Officers are assigned to this location in patrol vehicles and will issue citations to drivers for speeding and other traffic violations. Officers must log time devoted and number of citations in each selective enforcement location.

The C.A.R.E. program provides the opportunity for residents to become involved in the speeding problem. Residents are issued a radar unit for a temporary period of time which they may use to monitor traffic. Violations are documented on a department-prepared form letter which is sent to the registered owner of the speeding vehicle. The C.A.R.E. program offers a first-hand observation of true speeds to the resident.

Unfortunately, there is no general solution to the problem of speeding traffic. Often times, the true problem stems mostly from drivers that live in the neighborhood. There will always be drivers that speed through residential areas, and it is important for residents in a neighborhood to be aware of this issue.

The best answer the Police Department may provide is that parents should always be conscientious of their children when playing near streets and intersections. Children should be educated on street safety and this should continually be reinforced.

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Q. WHY DON'T WE HAVE CROSSING GUARDS AT ALL SCHOOL CROSSING?

A. The primary objective at a school pedestrian crossing is the protection of children. The chances of meeting this objective increase if the school children and drivers can easily interpret, understand, and follow the traffic control directives (e.g. signs) in the area of the crossing. Keeping the signing and/or traffic control within school zones consistent throughout a particular jurisdiction accomplishes this understanding. Adult crossing guards are used at some school crossings in order to supply adequate crossing breaks in the traffic flow, but this type of traffic control can be expensive and the need must be closely evaluated.

A properly designed route to school should not require the use of adult crossing guards. However, this depends on the location of the school, the roadway network, and the location of the child's home. A safe travel route must be selected for young pedestrians going to and from school, and the roadway crossings along that route should be at locations that have adequate and existing traffic control to guide the child. In some cases, this may require the child to travel a longer distance. Crossings are determined by the existing traffic control, sidewalk availability, the number and age of children using the crossing, total extra walking distance required, traffic volume, street width, traffic speed, sight distance, and safe stopping distance.

With or without crossing guards, the education of drivers and pedestrians of the possible conflicts may be necessary. Children can benefit from keeping in mind that they should be careful when crossing the street and that not all drivers are necessarily watching out for them. Drivers need to be aware of the possibility of pedestrians in the area.