

4. SPEED MANAGEMENT STRATEGY: 40 KM/H PART TIME SPEED LIMITS WITHIN SCHOOL ZONES

RR 9987

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Corporate Plan Output: Traffic Signs and Markings	

The purpose of this report is to obtain the Committee's views on whether or not to proceed with further representation to the Land Transport Safety Authority to trial 40 km/h part time speed limits within five specific school zones in the city. The Authority has turned down the Council's application.

BACKGROUND

The Committee will be aware of our application to the Director, Land Transport Safety Authority, of 9 October 1998 for a proposed trial of 40 km/h part time speed limits within the following school zones:

- Branston Intermediate School
- Bishopdale School
- Harewood School
- Belfast School
- Halswell School

The reason for the application to trial the "school speed zone" concept arose from community concern in Christchurch about the need to ensure that drivers do not exceed the 50 km/h limit outside schools in urban areas. In rural areas speed is seen as a critical safety factor especially where speed limits are greater than 70 km/h. School speed zones have, in various forms, been operating in other countries (including Australia) for some time.

The Christchurch City Council's proposal, in association with Transit NZ, was based on the Victorian State's Guidelines for part time speed limits outside schools but with more "active" signs.

The City Council at its meeting on 23 July 1997 resolved that the Council propose to the Land Transport Safety Authority:

1. That there be mandatory 40 km/h zones at schools, the operating time be determined in accord with an approved school road safety plan.
2. That in areas with speed limits 70 km/h or higher the underlying speed limit be 70 km/h or 80 km/h outside schools with special speed zones being 40 km/h.
3. That illuminated flashing signs indicating that the zone is in operation be installed at every school speed zone and operated by the school.
4. That a driver rule change be made to require compliance with school speed zones.
5. That the proposal be trialed at a number of Christchurch schools during the 1998/99 financial year (or sooner if possible) and be funded by Transit NZ where roads are Transit roads and the Council where the zones are on Council roads.

The Christchurch City Council submission had as its objective to trial 40 km/h part time speed limits within the school zones outside the five schools listed above and that the trial be conducted over a two year period. The aim of the submission was to gain LTSA approval to trial the effectiveness of part time speed limits within school zones. The expected outcome was to ascertain the effectiveness of part time speed limits within school zones on driver behaviour and the development of criteria which would assist in selecting future sites for part time speed limits within school zones.

THE SUBMISSION

The submission was in two parts:

Part 1 provided the rationale for the proposals to introduce part time speed limits within school zones at the five Christchurch locations. Background detail was given as to the existing speed situations outside schools at eight locations that were considered to be worthy of some form of "active" control on speeds. Student travel patterns as part of the Safe Routes to School programme were detailed along with our concerns as a City Council for creating a safe environment in which school pupils can safely walk and cycle to school.

Two forms of "active" controls were proposed:

Option 1

A static 40 km/h part time speed circle electronically displayed only at times of school activity. A permanent warning "school zone" static message sign with black lettering on a fluorescent yellow/green background. An alternating flashing yellow signal display with one aspect above and the other below the diamond shaped permanent warning sign.

Option 2

As for option 1 but minus the alternating flashing yellow signal. The electronic speed limit sign would flash.

Part 2. This part of the document included supporting reports of the Christchurch City Council and from other New Zealand and overseas sources.

THE LAND TRANSPORT SAFETY AUTHORITY'S RESPONSE

A letter from Acting Director Alan Woodside dated 13 May 1999 and addressed to the City Manager was faxed to the Council on 14 May 1999. Mr Woodside informed us that the LTSA had sought a review of the proposal from an independent traffic practitioner "*to ensure the application received a fair and appropriate level of analysis*".

Mr Woodside stated that *"based on this report and the Land Transport Safety Authority's own analysis of the proposal, given the most optimistic outcome of a trial, would fail to meet the LTSA's obligation to demonstrate safety at reasonable cost in any of its policy decisions. I must therefore decline to approve the proposed trial."* A copy of Mr Woodside's letter and specific comments on the Council's application is attached to this report.

The LTSA have stated that the Council's application *"did not substantiate a measurable traffic problem nor does it evaluate the possible reduction in risk the proposal was expected to achieve"*. The specific comments on the proposal included:

- The question of whether the safety problem within school zones is real or perceived.
- No analysis of the risk of crashes occurring was given in our submission. However, the LTSA has undertaken analysis of the crash risk to children near schools. It is understood that a report will be available shortly and be forwarded to the Council.
- The authority questioned the rationale behind the benefit/cost calculations suggesting that they were incomplete and that costs were not fully taken into account.
- Publicity, enforcement and consultation. The authority pointed out that these factors would have an impact on the cost of this project and would be ongoing if the trials were to proceed.
- Problems arising from the proposed length of the part time speed limit (300 - 400 metres) rather than the 500 metres widely accepted as being the minimum speed limit length in New Zealand.
- The authority suggested that as the evaluation methodology was not fully described they had reservations about the conduct of the proposed trial.
- Equipment. Although the specific design options were not considered in any detail by the authority they did have some concerns about the issues. The flashing numerical display for the speed limit sign was not supported. Questioned also was the method of collecting speed data information and the methods used by road controlling authorities against the criteria set down by the LTSA.

COUNCIL RESPONSE

Councillors would have had a high expectation that the proposal to trial the 40 km/h part time speed limits within school zones would have been successful. Transit NZ was supporting the trial on the basis of two of the sites being on State Highways. The concept was supported by the community and taken up enthusiastically by Council officers with a view to achieving a result this year.

It is disappointing that the LTSA has not supported the proposed trial based on the authority's obligation to "*demonstrate safety at reasonable cost for any of its policy decisions*". The suggestion is that, whilst school speed zones are used in other countries, New Zealand has a good record when it comes to children's safety outside schools. National policy would need to change if the school speed zone concept was to be adopted in New Zealand.

The Council needs to consider whether or not to pursue the concept involving 40 km/h part time speed limits within school zones given the message from the Land Transport Safety Authority that any trial would fail to meet the LTSA's obligation to demonstrate safety at reasonable cost. An important factor is the cost of research and a need to provide for this if the notion of a trial is to be pursued. To date, \$8,000 has been expended on investigation, research and the application to the LTSA. Budget provision for 1998/99 is \$60,000. Equipment costs will be high. However, we were anticipating that the three school sites on roads controlled by the Council could have been provided with appropriate signs and active displays within budget had the concept been approved by the LTSA.

CONCLUSION

The Council should make strong representation to the LTSA to reconsider its decision to decline to approve the proposed trial. Consideration will need to be given to the amount of additional information that should be provided in support of the trial for 40 km/h part time speed limits within school zones and any modification to technical aspects of the proposal.

Recommendation: That the Committee consider the options for continuing representation to the Land Transport Safety Authority for the trial of 40 km/h part time speed limits within school zones.

Chairman's

Recommendation:

1. That the Council make strong representation to the Land Transport Safety Authority to reconsider its decision to decline to approve the proposed trial.
2. That the Committee meet with the LTSA and other interested parties to discuss the issues.