



People for Proper Policing in North Wales

[An Australian Experts explanation of the 'safespeed' philosophy](#)

By **John Lambert** MIEAust, CPEng Bachelor of Engineering, ARMIT

"The speeding issue is not nearly as clear cut as it is portrayed."

Firstly in spite of how it is portrayed responsible drivers drive very safely indeed. The chance of a responsible driver being in a police reported car crash in which someone is injured to the degree they need a doctor's visit is around once in 5 lifetimes.

Alternately the rate of injury requiring medical attention is: for soccer - 0.06 to 0.065 injuries (at the elite level) per 100 hours playing or practising. AND for car travel around 0.0013 injuries/ per 100 hours of travel

That is playing soccer is 50 - 500 times more dangerous in respect of getting injured.

Secondly the setting of speed limits is very arbitrary - and usually determined by the road environment and abutting access or development ONLY. It may be adjusted if there is an accident problem, or if the 85Th. percentile speed suggests it is too low or too high - but that is very rare.

Usually there are minimum lengths for speed limits, which is why advisory speed signs are used say at a tight corner or series of curves where sight distance may be a problem.

And we, as drivers, recognise speed limits are only an approximation. Responsible drivers travel well below the speed limit in many circumstances. For instance in narrow streets with parked cars and houses on both sides we drive well below the urban speed limit. We slow for roundabouts and drive at speeds that are less than the speed limit around them. Whenever we as responsible drivers are in a situation where we perceive risk we slow down - fog, heavy rain, cars stopped so our sight is obscured, groups of children waiting to cross the road and so on.

And on occasions we may judge it is safe to drive at speeds higher than the speed limit - that is the traffic in general may decide to drive at speeds that exceed the limit. This is not a safety issue, as if the situation is investigated it will be found that there are usually no or very few crashes on those segments of road.

So in general all the "good" research shows:= that the risk of crashes rises rapidly where a driver chooses to travel much slower than the traffic stream "knows" is appropriate (say a driver travelling at 20 km/h or more below the average speed when the

risk of crashes may be 8 or more times higher) or at speeds that are much higher than the average speed (at 10 km/h greater the risk may be 8 times and at 15 km/h greater it may be 30 times higher

Hence what is really required is an enforcement system that detects and fines those travelling very much slower (unless they have flashing lights or other devices in recognition they are a slow moving vehicle) or much faster than the average driver.

Then it would be a win-win! The average responsible driver would not be fined at all, and those that were risk takers would be fined and encouraged to conform.

And this would also allow Police to take action against those who travel at inappropriate speeds through unsafe curves et cetera. And those who for instance travel much faster than responsible drivers in fog.

I trust this gives you some insight into the issues related to speed, speeding, and appropriate speeds. Note that most crashes occur at or close to intersections - and speed cameras are rarely placed at intersections to catch those speeding through intersections. Where they are placed is generally on wide straight sections of road where few crashes occur. You might like to think about the locations that you know of where speed cameras exist.