

Reducing residential speed limits would increase safety

By **Jackie Chow - Maple Ridge News**

Published: **July 21, 2013 8:00 AM**

At the upcoming Union of B.C. Municipalities Convention in September, the City of Victoria is putting forward a resolution proposing a reduction of the maximum speed limit on all B.C. residential roads from 50 to 40 km/h.

This initiative is led by Coun. Shellie Gudgeon, who says a majority of Victoria residents are supportive, but admits that there is some strong opposition from the very vocal auto-centric crowd.

The Association of Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities has given its support to the proposal.

The arguments in favour of reducing the speed limit are obvious.

The probability of pedestrian fatality is 20 per cent at an impact speed of 40 km/h, and at 50 km/h it's 80 per cent.

A slower speed will improve the reaction time of drivers as well the breaking distance.

Of course, 50 km/h is not an appropriate speed for residential streets, which should be primarily for people, not just for cars.

The only time that cars need to be on residential roads is when they are leaving home, returning home, or visiting.

Residential streets are not meant to be used by cars that are just passing through.

Traffic speed on arterials wouldn't be affected by this proposal and would still be 50 km/h unless posted otherwise.

Inconvenience and loss of time for drivers are going to be minimal, whereas it significantly improves safety for residents, pedestrians and cyclists.

Complaints about speeding seem to have increased in various neighbourhoods, but municipalities are often reluctant to put up costly signs with lower speed limits on roads where speeding tends to be a problem.

In Vancouver, roads that are designated as bike routes have maximum speeds of 30 km/h, whereas in Maple Ridge this is 50 km/h.

Especially on bike routes where bicycles share the road with cars, it makes sense to reduce the speed limits to 30 km/h, so that cyclists of all ages and abilities will feel comfortable using them.

According to a recent HUB membership survey, a mandatory 30 km/h speed limit on all residential streets designated as bike routes is among the Top 5 issues.

As I explained last month, the key word for cycling is separation.

Our HUB committee is proposing 30 km/h speed limits in the Maple Ridge town core.

Reduced speeds would make the downtown a much more pedestrian, cycling and shopping friendly environment.

Some of our downtown streets are very wide, and even with crosswalks it can still be daunting for seniors and others who take a little more time to cross the street when cars go 50 km/h or sometimes even faster.

Also, drivers tend to have tunnel-vision when going faster and look more for other fast-moving objects such as cars, but are less likely to notice pedestrians trying to cross the street.

I suspect the RCMP are most likely not in favour of lowering speed limits, since it would be difficult to enforce.

When determining maximum speed limits, how fast people tend to drive on a certain road tends to be an important factor.

If drivers seem to feel that 50 km/h is a safe speed, then those who are tasked with enforcing the laws are more likely to recommend those speeds be used as maximum speed limits, even if they're not ideal.

A good way to encourage drivers to obey the traffic rules is by changing the geometric road design. Poor road design – very wide and straight road – often seduces drivers to speed.

Apart from narrower car lanes or making roads less straight, for example changing the curve radii, adding bulb-outs (which reduces the distance for pedestrians to cross the road) and adding street trees can also help to slow cars down.

Write to your mayor and council to ask them to vote in favour of the resolution for a provincial 40 km/h speed limit on all residential roads.

Jackie Chow is a member of the Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows chapter of HUB.