

# Traffic Note 15 – Revision 1

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**From:** Safer Roads  
**Authorisation:** Don Hutchinson, Acting Manager Safer Roads

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

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## Use of temporary speed limits for temporary hazards and special events – guidelines

### 1 Purpose

The installation of temporary speed limits helps to control traffic at temporary hazards and for special events. In general, temporary speed limits are not designed to be used to warn motorists of long-term road performance deficiencies that cannot be immediately rectified. This note examines temporary speed limits and provides recommendations for their effective management and use.

### 2 Temporary speed limits

The *Land Transport Rule: Setting of Speed Limits 2003* (the rule) provides for the installation of temporary speed limit signs on roads where there is a temporary risk of danger to the public or road workers, or of damage to the road, or for special events. In these circumstances, a road controlling authority (RCA) must consider the need for a temporary speed limit. The limit may be any multiple of 10 within the range of 20 to 80 km/h, but must be at least 20 km/h less than the existing speed limit on the road.

A temporary speed limit is defined in the rule as a speed limit that is in force for a period of less than six months and is generally used for short-term road hazards, active road work sites or special events. A temporary speed limit may also be appropriate on a section of long-term, inactive road works, or at other locations where:

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1. the surface has been damaged due to previous road work, slip, subsidence etc  
**and**
2. there are road features such as reduced width, extremely poor alignment or detours, non-useable shoulders etc that are completely out of character with the approaches and with the normal condition of the road  
**or**
3. there are good technical reasons (eg the road might otherwise collapse)  
**and**
4. other traffic control devices have been installed to control vehicle speeds.

In these situations, the nature of the roadway deficiency (or the traffic control devices) should be evident to motorists so that they recognise the need to adjust their behaviour.

The temporary speed limit gives positive direction and guidance and, if set at an appropriate level, should receive a good level of compliance.

### **3 Varying a temporary speed limit**

Temporary speed limits affect the safety of workers, event participants and road users. If not set realistically, drivers often ignore them, which can lead to reduced compliance with all temporary speed limits. In addition, the police may not feel they can justify enforcing temporary speed limits that are obviously not appropriate for the conditions.

To improve driver compliance, varying the temporary speed limit may be appropriate in the following circumstances:

- Within the work zone. Where a long work zone is established, but active work is concentrated within a specific area, a lower speed limit might be applicable in the area where work is actually being carried out.
- Over the work period. Different stages of works may require different safety levels and therefore higher or lower temporary speed limits may be appropriate, depending on the stage.
- Over a 24-hour period. A higher temporary speed limit might be more appropriate within an established work zone during a period when workers are inactive, eg at night.

RCA's sometimes vary a temporary speed limit on the approach to a work zone, in order to create a 'buffer zone' so vehicles slow down in stages. However, research has shown that motorists do not tend to comply with these temporary speed limits unless there is obvious activity in the area of the buffer zone. Instead, we recommend installing a ' "0 km/h AHEAD' (TW-1B.3) supplementary sign below a roadworks (TW-1) sign to indicate that a speed limit change is ahead.

### **4 Traffic management plan**

The rule requires that a traffic management plan (TMP) be approved, in writing, by the relevant RCA before a temporary speed limit can be installed. The TMP should detail the limit and any other conditions such as the positioning of the signs and the times during which the limit applies.

In addition, RCAs should have a pre-approved general contingency TMP in place, to be used for emergency situations where a hazard such as flooding, slips or road subsidence suddenly develops. This TMP should provide for a contractor to be on call to establish traffic control at any site where an emergency situation arises, including installation of temporary speed limits. This pre-approved TMP should only be used for a short duration depending on the hazard type. A site-specific TMP should be developed if conditions require a temporary speed limit to be in place for more than a few days.

Regardless of circumstances, a temporary speed limit applies for a maximum period of six months. After six months, the RCA must review the temporary speed limit, and if it is still required, then a new TMP will need to be approved in accordance with the procedures in the rule.

## 5 Warning signs

On sections of road that do not fall into the criteria described in section 2 above it is generally inappropriate to install a temporary speed limit. In these circumstances permanent warning signs, ie those with yellow rather than orange backgrounds, should be erected to advise road users of the effect of any detected deficiency.

For example, if a section of road fails to meet standard skid resistance properties then a PW-41 'slippery surface' sign may be appropriate at the commencement and at significant locations along the section. Appropriate supplementary signs could include 'WHEN WET' and 'NEXT x km'.

N.B. The procedure for determining whether a sign is required and its format should follow normal practice for the erection of any permanent warning sign.

## 6 Recommendations

Temporary speed limits must be set in accordance with the rule and should:

- **be set** in the circumstances described in section 2 of this note
- **be set** in accordance with a pre-approved traffic management plan (TMP) for emergency situations
- **not be set** to warn motorists of long-term road performance deficiencies that cannot be immediately rectified

Signs used for warning motorists of long-term road performance deficiencies that cannot be immediately rectified should be permanent warning signs, ie on a yellow, rather than orange background. The procedure for determining whether a sign is necessary and its format should follow normal practice for the erection of any permanent warning sign.