
Speed limit consultation: Saddle Road, Manawatū

January 2019

Summary of process and outcome

1. Background

In January 2019, the NZ Transport Agency consulted with stakeholders and the public on the proposed permanent speed limits for Saddle Road/Oxford Road/Woodlands Road/SH3 in the Manawatū.

The route is one of the bypass routes for the SH3 Manawatū Gorge, which closed in April 2017. Following the sharp increase in traffic and subsequent crashes due to the gorge closure, emergency speed limits were put in place in January 2018. These emergency speed limits expired on 25 January 2019, so safe and appropriate permanent speed limits needed to be set.

As Saddle Road is being used as an alternative route for the closed SH3 Manawatū Gorge, the Transport Agency is managing and maintaining the road on behalf of the three local councils (Tararua District Council, Manawatū District Council and Palmerston North City Council).

The Transport Agency exercised its regulatory powers under clause 2.10(6) of the Land Transport Rule: Setting of Speed Limits (2017) to set permanent speed limits for Saddle Road/Oxford Road/Woodlands Road, and under clause 2.5 of the Rule for SH3.

The Manawatū District Council consulted and set a 60km/h limit on its part of the route (2km length east of the Ashhurst Bridge).

2. Consultation process

The Transport Agency consulted on the proposed permanent speed limits for Saddle Road between 14–18 January 2019. In order to set permanent speed limits before the emergency speed limits expire, the consultation period was limited to one week. This enables safe and permanent speed limits to be set, the public notified of the changes, and new speed limit signs put up before 25 January 2019.

Consultation materials provided evidence that supported the proposed safe and appropriate speed limits. This included the increase in traffic volume since the closure of the gorge, and a subsequent increase in crashes, current typical travel speeds, the characteristics of the road, including a windy and narrow nature with steep drop-offs, and the effect on travel times of the proposed limits.

The consultation was advertised through social media, on the Transport Agency's website and in the Manawatū Standard. A media release was issued and resulted in a story on Stuff.

People were able to submit their views through the electronic form, via email, or by ringing the 0800 4 HIGHWAYS phone number. This ensured anyone that didn't have access to the internet could still provide feedback.

Prior to consultation with the public, engagement with stakeholders including the three councils, the Police, the AA and the Road Transport Forum was undertaken. Feedback from these groups indicated a good level of support for a lower speed limit.

3. Consultation question

The factors that were taken into consideration when proposing the permanent speed limits were communicated to the public in the consultation documents.

The consultation phase is used to seek any additional information from stakeholders or the public that will help inform the decision about the proposed speed limits

Stakeholders and the public was asked “**Are there any other factors that we should consider when making our decision?**”

4. Understanding consultation responses

The NZ Transport Agency undertook national and regional research to in 2017 to explore community perceptions of road risk. The research sought to understand individual attitudes to road risk and the impact that conversations and understanding of risk might have on safer choices.

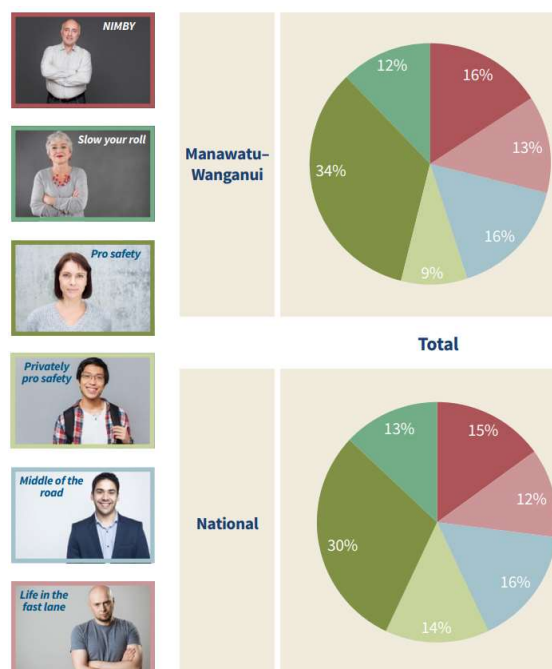
The research identified the following key differences in Manawatū–Wanganui compared to the national findings:

- **Conversation:** People from the Manawatū–Wanganui area are in line with the rest of New Zealand when it comes to conversations about road risk. They are less aware of road safety messages (64% vs 71% for national average).
- **Confidence:** People from the Manawatū–Wanganui area identify similar road risks as the rest of New Zealand. They are less confident about the risks they have identified.
- **Choices:** People from the Manawatū–Wanganui area are less likely to support speed limit reduction. They are less likely to agree that police enforcement improves road safety (39% vs 50% for national average).
- **Care:** People from the Manawatū–Wanganui area place a similar level of importance on road safety as the rest of New Zealand. However, they rank road safety lower in importance relative to other community issues. They are less likely to think road risk is increasing.

The national research identified six community road risk segments:

1. **NIMBY:** One of the most vocal voices in the community and strongly oppose speed limit reduction; confident they can identify road risks and judge the best speed for the road.
2. **Slow your roll:** Most concerned with road safety and highly supportive of speed limit reductions; agree some roads are not safe at the set speed limit.
3. **Pro safety:** Concerned about road risk and have conversations about it, but are less confident in their understanding of road risk and solution.
4. **Privately pro safety:** Concerned about road risk and support speed limit reductions; do not have public conversations about road safety; have a lower confidence in their understanding of risk and solutions.
5. **Middle of the road:** Believe improving road safety is important but are less concerned than other segments; less likely to state road deaths are avoidable; less aware of road safety messages and tend to not talk about road risk.
6. **Life in the fast lane:** Least likely to believe improving road safety is important; most likely to agree road deaths are unavoidable; more likely to drive above the speed limit and are highly opposed to speed limit reduction.

The distribution across the segments for Manawatū–Wanganui region is very similar to the national distribution:



The segments of the community that are publicly strongly either for or against speed management ('slow your roll' and 'NIMBY') are most likely to respond to speed limit consultation requests. Based on this research, the consultation responses received represent the views of approximately 28% of the community, and the pro safety 'silent majority' won't be represented.

More information is available here: <https://www.nzta.govt.nz/safety/speed-management-resources/better-conversations-on-road-risk/perceptions-on-risk-on-the-road/>

5. Summary of submissions

217 submissions were received from the public and stakeholder organisations.

While a number of submissions did include factors that were taken into consideration when setting the permanent speed limits, the majority of the submissions expressed only an opinion about the proposed limits.

The main factors that were expressed in the feedback from the public were the need for more enforcement of dangerous driving and speed limits, including speed cameras, improved signage at slow vehicle bays and corners, and more and longer slow vehicle bays and passing lanes. However, a number of people said these additional lanes and bays would be irrelevant because drivers wouldn't be able to overtake slower vehicles while staying below the 60km/h limit.

A number of submissions expressed the belief that the lower speed limits would cause frustration and lead to drivers taking more risks with overtaking and dangerous manoeuvres, which would increase the number of crashes.

Submissions expressed the need for other safety improvements to the roads and the desire for the gorge replacement route to be completed more quickly.

Submissions also said lower speed limits will mean more people will use the Pahiatua Track as their alternate route to the gorge.

6. Response to submissions

The Transport Agency is always looking for ways to improve the safety of our roads. The consultation feedback has been passed onto the relevant Transport Agency staff who will look into opportunities suggested by the public to improve the safety of this route. This route is included in the top 5% of the regional network which will result in the greatest reduction in death and serious injury through speed management.

Some of the specific feedback is addressed below:

- **“The 60km/h proposal will encourage slow drivers to drive even slower than 60km/h, and increase the number of frustrated drivers and dangerous driving”**
A review of average travel speeds shows people are typically driving at 55–59km/h along the Saddle Road hill. A number of the submissions noted that impatience was caused by drivers targeting the current 80km/h limits being frustrated by drivers content to travel at a safe and appropriate speed. The 60km/h speed limit proposed will remove the encouragement of some drivers to target 80km/h.
- **“60km/h would not allow legal passing, particularly on passing lanes”**
The current passing lane at the Saddle Road summit starts where the 60km/h speed limit changes to 80km/h; vehicles in the left lane increase their speed to 80km/h, meaning speeds of 90–100km/h are required to pass them. Slower speed limits on passing lanes means traffic in the left lane isn’t encouraged to speed up, meaning passing can be accomplished at safer speeds.
- **“The increase of crashes was less than the percentage increase in traffic volumes since the gorge closure”**
No crash resulting in death or serious injury is acceptable, and every opportunity should be taken to address them, particularly where they have increased, whatever the reason. Reducing crashes will also make the route more reliable, reducing delays and maintaining economic productivity.
- **“Most of the crashes occurred at corners and were not noted as speed related in the Police reporting”**
Speed influences the impact outcome of all crashes – a consistent 60km/h speed limit will reduce driver mistakes and their consequences approaching the many tight curves across the Saddle Road hill.

7. Decision

The following are the recommendations the Transport Agency consulted on:

- 80km/h for SH3 from Woodville to Woodlands Road, Woodlands Road, Oxford Road and Saddle Road from Hope Road to Mangaatua Stream
- 60km/h for Saddle Road from Ashhurst to Mangaatua Stream

The submissions did not identify any issues that the Transport Agency had not already considered.

The final decision was in line with the proposal, and the permanent speed limits outlined above came into effect on 25 January 2019. Stakeholders were notified by letter and the public were notified via a media release, newspaper advertising, and social media ahead of the new speed limits signs being installed.

Map showing the permanent speed limits

