

Some road safety ideas

EDITORIAL

HARDLY A WEEK goes by without our receiving a news release from an Ontario Provincial Police concerning a serious personal injury accident or the arrest of a driver whose vehicle was clocked doing more than 50 km/h above the posted speed limit.

A proper investigation might well turn up evidence of some linkage between these seemingly unrelated incidents.

At least as we see it, the vast majority of crashes and "racing" charges are products of two phenomena, the absence of safety measures found elsewhere in North America and a universal disobedience of speed laws that bear little or no relation to actual driving conditions.

After all, is there anywhere else in the world where the same 80 km/h speed limit applies to multi-lane rural roadways like Highway 10 between Orangeville and Highway 410 and narrow dirt or gravel roadways in rural areas which have no signs setting the legal maximum speed?

What is urgently needed is reform of Ontario's current processes for setting speed limits, which allow local municipalities to set limits that respond to local residents' demands rather than the actual road design and conditions. In too many instances in Dufferin and Caledon, roads that once were narrow, gravel and unposted, thus bearing an 80 km/h limit, are now wider, paved and posted at 60 km/h.

In our view, any successful move to improve road safety should include speed-law reforms aimed at ensuring that all roadways in the province have speed limits that will be supported by the vast majority of drivers.

On ordinary provincial highways that would mean raising the limits to 100 km/h and on freeways and the 407 toll road to 110 or 120 km/h except where they are in urban areas.

Since the main objective of the new speed limits would be to gain universal acceptance rather than just to have everyone drive faster, the new limits should be accompanied by elimination of "tolerances" that usually see drivers in rural areas ticketed only if they go more than 20 km/h above the posted maximum.

On the same date that the new speed limits are posted, drivers should risk being ticketed if they go more than 5 km/h over the new limit or more than 5 km/h below that same limit in ideal weather conditions.

If adopted by the government, the new theme, "Go With the Flow," would sharply reduce the incidence of head-on collisions caused by unsafe passing on two-lane roads.

However, the new speed limits should also be accompanied by introduction of uniform standards in the design of provincial highways.

As matters stand, design decisions are currently Made By Regional Offices of Ontario's Ministry of Transportation rather than the Ministry itself. This is perfectly illustrated by the treatment of Highways 9 and 10, where the Ministry's Central Region office in Downsview is responsible for Highway 9 and Highway 10 only as far north as Orangeville. Beyond that the road design for No. 10 is determined by the ministry's London-based West Region office.

As a result, left turn lanes were long ago provided on No. 8 at virtually every intersection, while more heavily travelled No. 10 has no turning lanes at Mono's 25 and 30 Sideroads and only this year got one at 20 Sideroad.

Two other features are missing in almost all of Ontario's provincial highways.

One is paved shoulders, which are desperately needed for safe cycling on busy highways, yet today are found only on a few county roads and some of the 400-series freeways.

The other is large electronic signs with flashing yellow lights to warn traffic that the signals are about to change on the approaching intersection.

Such warning signs have been saving countless lives in British Columbia for at least 50 years, while the only ones we've encountered recently are in Fergus, although smaller ones exist in both Dufferin and Caledon.

Such warning signs should be erected at all major rural intersections, but the first such installation should be at Old School Road in Caledon, the first signals encountered by traffic coming off Highway 410.

Admittedly, such signs may not be needed in urban areas with speed limits at or below 60 km/h.