

SPEED LIMIT MYTHS - BUSTED

Myth 4: “I feel safe so the speed limit should be higher” – BUSTED

Historically, speed limits on roads were set according to a road hierarchy based mainly on speed and mobility. There was less consideration of the safety benefits of adopting lower speeds. In the early days there was only a limited understanding of safety in relation to vehicle crashes, vehicle occupant protection and vulnerable road users. This has left a legacy where people are accustomed to travelling at speeds which are incompatible with achieving zero road trauma.



Most road users have personal experience of regularly travelling at high speeds with little or no ill-consequence to themselves. There is very little feedback in the road environment to remind people that risks exist. Given that the individual risk of being involved in a fatal crash is small, a doubling of this small risk is also likely to go un-noticed. This results in drivers building up, over a lifetime, a perception that driving or riding above the speed limit has very little or no negative safety consequence.

The picture of risk changes completely when all road users are considered as a single large group. When all of the small risks for individual users are added together the result is a level of risk which means fatal and serious injury crashes will happen. To achieve safe speeds on the road network, there is a challenge in

how to communicate the scientific evidence that population risk can be lowered through speed management.

These factors are often further complicated and exaggerated by “Optimism Bias”, which is the tendency for someone to believe that they are less likely to experience a negative event and/or more likely to experience a positive event than their peers. This makes it difficult for individuals to counter their tendency to drive at a speed higher than the speed limit without any supporting measures (such as traffic calming treatments and/or speed limit enforcement). Despite these challenges, speed management continues to be one of the most effective ways of transitioning to a Safe System and reducing the rates of fatal and serious injury crashes. Although much focus has been placed on better aligning speed limits with injury reduction, there is also significant opportunity to further support road users through better road design features at points of elevated risk in the road network.

As far as possible, speed limits are set based on measurable collective risk. In the majority of cases, where speed limits have been raised, research shows that where risk increases so does road trauma. See Myth 2.

