

SPEED LIMIT MYTHS - BUSTED

Myth 7: “50km/h is the right default speed limit in built-up areas” – BUSTED

All roads facilitate the movement of people and goods, but urban roads must integrate into our cities, towns and suburbs so that people want to live, work and play in these centres of activity. This means ensuring that urban roads service the needs of all people for access, amenity and a sense of ‘place’.

Lower traffic speeds make it more attractive for people to walk and cycle which has a number of benefits. Our health, both physical and mental, improves as a result of being more active, and interactive. Those with impaired mobility can move around more easily and the very young and very old feel safer and more independent. Shops, businesses and activity centres can thrive and the overall transport system is more sustainable and environmentally friendly.

There are significant safety benefits that result from having speed limits in urban areas that are less than 50km/h. Lower speed limits in built-up areas help reduce pedestrian fatalities and injuries. Travelling at lower speeds improves a driver's likelihood of stopping and avoiding crashes, especially in areas of high pedestrian activity. Where crashes occur they are less severe, especially for children and the elderly.

Consider the following example:

- One car is travelling at 40km/h, another at 50km/h. Both drivers see a pedestrian about 27 metres ahead, recognise the danger and brake. The car travelling at 40km/h will stop safely after 26 metres, and will not hit the pedestrian. The car travelling at 50km/h will take an extra nine metres to stop, and will still be travelling at 41km/h when it hits the pedestrian.

Even a small difference in vehicle speed can make a large difference to the danger of serious injury:

- At an impact speed of 50km/h, 85% of pedestrians hit by a vehicle will die.
- At an impact speed of 40km/h, 40% of pedestrians hit by a vehicle will die.
- At an impact speed of 30km/h, 10% of pedestrians hit by a vehicle will die.



With these statistics in mind the Safe System speed, or aspirational operating speed (as described in the Austroads Guide to Road Safety Part 3), in areas where there is a possibility of a collision between a vulnerable road user and a passenger vehicle is 30 km/h.

Trials of 30km/h speed limits have already started or are planned to start at various locations across Victoria. Some examples of these areas are:

- The township of Walhalla started a 6 month trial on its Main Road in April 2018
- The City of Yarra started a trial in parts of Fitzroy and Collingwood in October 2018

City of Melbourne is considering 30km/h for some CBD streets as identified in discussion papers open to public consultation to inform their transport policy.

