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# Safe Neighbourhoods, Safe Streets

## **Problem Statement: The Urgent Need for a Provincial Safe Speeds Law to Protect Vulnerable Road Users**

British Columbia's Motor Vehicle Act (MVA) currently sets the default speed limit for all roads, including residential neighbourhood streets, at 50 km/h unless otherwise posted. This outdated default speed presents a serious, systemic barrier to improving safety for the most vulnerable users of our transportation system, including children, seniors, people walking, cycling and using mobility aids like wheelchairs or scooters.

At 50 km/h, the risk of death or serious injury in the event of a collision is significantly elevated. A person struck at this speed is approximately five times more likely to be killed compared to a collision at 30 km/h. Numerous public health agencies, including the World Health Organization and BC's own Provincial Health Officer, recommend 30 km/h as the appropriate default for neighbourhood streets to protect lives and reduce the burden of injury on our healthcare system.

This policy gap puts lives at risk, undermines BC's transportation and climate goals, and disproportionately affects marginalized populations. Seniors make up nearly half of pedestrian fatalities in Vancouver, and low-income and racialized communities often live in areas with fewer safety features and higher traffic volumes. Unsafe speeds discourage people from choosing active transportation modes—walking, cycling, rolling—making it harder to reduce emissions, promote public health, and foster livable, connected communities.

There is a broad range of support in BC for safety measures to increase the safety of vulnerable road users across the province, including reductions in speed for vehicles in neighbourhood/residential streets.

## CONCERNS

1. **Increased Risk of Injury and Death:** At higher speeds, the likelihood and severity of collisions—especially involving pedestrians and cyclists—increase dramatically. A person struck by a vehicle at 50 km/h is *about five times more likely* to be killed than at 30 km/h. Lower speeds reduce both the number and severity of crashes.
2. **Reduced Safety for Vulnerable Road Users:** Children, seniors, people walking, cycling, and using mobility aids are disproportionately affected by higher vehicle speeds. Without lower limits, residential streets remain hostile or inaccessible to these users, limiting their freedom and mobility.
3. **Inhibited Livability and Community Well-being:** High-speed traffic undermines the livability of residential neighborhoods. It discourages walking, cycling, outdoor play, and social interaction, and increases noise and stress for residents. Slower streets contribute to healthier, more vibrant communities.
4. **Barrier to Climate and Transportation Goals:** Not reducing speed limits works against modal shift goals outlined in transportation and climate goals. Higher speeds and the associated dangers, discourage people, especially children, seniors and people walking, cycling and using mobility devices from choosing active transportation and increase reliance on cars, which exacerbates emissions and congestion.

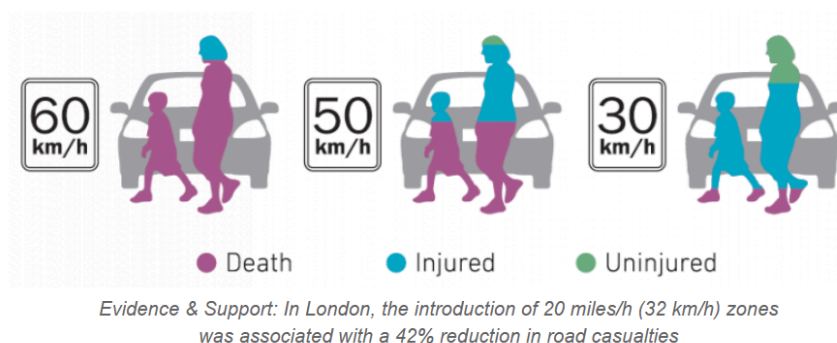
# POTENTIAL SOLUTION

HUB Cycling recommends a Safe Speeds Law that would require all vehicles to travel at a maximum 30 km/hour on neighbourhood streets (streets without a centre line) as the default speed limit. Exceptions would need to be specified with a sign on each block.

## Case for Support - 30 Km/h on neighborhood streets

Most people want slower speeds in their neighbourhoods: in a 2013 survey by the Canadian Automobile Association, 94% of respondents reported that speeding on residential streets was a serious threat to their personal safety. Support for reducing the speed limit to 30 km/h on all residential streets, while keeping the speed limit on arterial and collector roads at 50 km/h, is highest in Metro Vancouver (65%), followed by the Fraser Valley (62%), Northern BC (61%), Vancouver Island (59%) and Southern BC (58%) and several municipalities (Vancouver, Saanich, Victoria) have already launched pilot programs to test this safety measure.<sup>1</sup>

The faster a vehicle travels, the greater the risk of a crash—and the severity of injuries or death rises dramatically when a car strikes a vulnerable road user at speeds above 30 km/h.



In Toronto, reducing neighborhood speed limits to 30 km/h led to a 67% decrease in injuries.<sup>2</sup> Studies all across the globe echo the positive impact reductions in speed have had on communities where this reform has been enacted. On average, the implementation of 30 km/h speed limits in European cities demonstrated a 23%, 37%, and 38% reduction in road crashes, fatalities, and injuries, respectively. Lower speed limits also yielded environmental benefits, with emissions decreasing on average by 18%, noise pollution levels by 2.5 dB, and fuel consumption by 7%, indicating enhanced fuel efficiency and reduced environmental impact.<sup>3</sup>

Across BC, speeding on residential streets is a significant issue, with 10% of all ambulance calls in Vancouver resulting from injuries on these roads. The rate is even higher in places like

<sup>1</sup> [Public continues to embrace lower residential speed limits - Vancouver Is Awesome](#)

<sup>2</sup> [SickKids study finds speed limit reduction made Toronto roads safer for pedestrians | SickKids](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Road Safe](#)

Richmond.<sup>4</sup> Direct healthcare costs for transport injuries in 2019 are estimated at \$526.7 million for BC: [BC Road Safety Strategy 2025](#). Reducing speed in residential areas will have a positive impact on healthcare spending.

Reductions in speed limits on neighborhood streets would also have a profound impact on vulnerable or under-resourced populations in various ways:

1. **Reduction in Fatalities and Injuries:** Vulnerable road users are more susceptible to severe injuries and fatalities in traffic incidents. Enhancing road safety measures including reduced speeds can significantly lower the risk of injuries or deaths for these groups. For example, in 2023 in the City of Vancouver, seniors accounted for 45% of pedestrian fatalities, many caused by speeding vehicles.
2. **Increased Mobility:** Enhanced road safety including reducing speeds on residential roads can encourage vulnerable populations to engage in active transportation modes. Unsafe infrastructure is the top reason why people don't bike more. Increased usage of modes of active transport promote independence and reducing reliance on cars or public transport.
3. **Enhanced Accessibility:** Many vulnerable populations, including seniors, low-income individuals, and people with disabilities, rely on walking or cycling for their transportation needs. By improving road safety, we can create more accessible routes that accommodate everyone, making it easier for these populations to navigate their communities.
4. **Encouragement of Active Transportation:** Safe road environments encourage people to walk or bike rather than drive, contributing to healthier lifestyles. Regular physical activity reduces health risks associated with sedentary behavior, which can disproportionately affect vulnerable populations.
5. **Economic Benefits:** Road safety improvements can lead to reduced healthcare costs associated with traffic-related injuries. For low-income individuals, the financial burden of medical expenses or insurance expenses can be overwhelming. Safer streets can help mitigate these costs, allowing more resources to be allocated to essential needs.
6. **Addressing Disparities:** Vulnerable populations often bear the brunt of traffic-related harms due to socioeconomic factors, such as living in areas with heavy traffic, little to no street lighting, no safe active travel lanes/sidewalks or fewer safe crossings. Road safety improvements implemented on a provincial scale, not just one on a municipal or neighborhood scale, create a more equitable mobility system for both urban and rural populations.

## Examples from other provinces

Quebec updated their [Hwy Safety Code](#) in 2023 to incorporate increased safety guards for vulnerable road users including:

- Improved claiming measures and reducing speed limits in school zones.<sup>5</sup>
- Increasing penalties for dangerous driving (including doubling fines) around school zones

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<sup>4</sup> BC Injuries and Prevention Unit (Dr Meghan Winters)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.quebec.ca/en/transport/traffic-road-safety/traffic-rules-tips-for-all-vehicles/speed-limit>

- Allowing for the use of a automated enforcement devices in places like a school and construction zones
- Establishing responsibility for speed limit signing directives in a school zone to the person responsible for the maintenance of a public highway.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> 52 Section 294.0.1 of the Code is amended by adding the following paragraph at the end:

“In addition, the person responsible for the maintenance of a public highway is required to safely lay out the school zone, in particular by taking into account the application guide developed by the Minister of Transport on the subject.”