

## Should Winnipeg reduce its speed limits?

**Tom McMahon, co-chair, Bike to the Future, January 11, 2013**

On July 18, 2012, Winnipeg City Council asked staff for a report on reducing speed limits to 40 km/hr.

After six months, City staff has provided City Council with a report that is THREE pages long, with a one-page appendix.

There is no bibliography, no footnotes, no complete citations or links to the two reports that staff chose to cite. Of the two reports that City staff refer to, the report says one was deemed inconclusive and statistically significant, yet City staff chose to refer to it anyway. The other is a 1997 report.

### ***What is NOT in the report?***

The words “bicycle”, “cycling”, “cyclist”, “active transportation”, “mode share”, “sustainability” or “health” do not appear EVEN ONE TIME in the report.

The report does not mention that higher speeds may discourage people from choosing to walk or bicycle in the first place.

The report does not mention that lower speed limits may produce less wear and tear on the City’s deteriorating infrastructure, or that lower speed limits may be appropriate given the City’s deteriorating infrastructure.

The report does not mention that lower speeds will reduce emissions, will reduce gas consumption and will have an overall benefit on the air quality in Winnipeg. The benefits to the environment and climate change in general are not mentioned.

The report does not mention that encouraging more walking and cycling will have a dramatic effect on reducing health care costs is not mentioned.

The report does not mention persons with reduced mobility. The Province of Manitoba Advisory Group on Active Transportation stated in its 2011 report: Active transportation infrastructure central to facilities and centres for the aging or disabled should consider the needs of people with mobility issues by implementing measures such as shorter crossing distances at intersections, median refuges, curb cuts, wheelchair ramps, rest areas, audible signals, large print signage, lighting, snow/ice removal **and reduced traffic speed.**” (our emphasis)  
[www.gov.mb.ca/conservation/pdf/atag\\_report6.pdf](http://www.gov.mb.ca/conservation/pdf/atag_report6.pdf)

The report does not refer to any jurisdictions outside of Canada that have reduced their speed limits.

The report does not refer to any studies about the differing impacts on severity of injury at different speeds.

The report does not refer to any studies that recommend lower speed limits.

City staff have not conducted or contracted for any surveys of public opinion on the question of whether automobile speeds influence their decisions whether to walk or cycle in their neighbourhoods or what speed limits would encourage them to cycle or walk more often, or to encourage their children to bike or walk to school, the library, the community centre or the local grocery store.

The City staff report fails to inform City councilors that:

- the Minister of Healthy Living, Jim Rondeau, told the Winnipeg Free Press: "If we got another 10 per cent of inactive people active, we would save between \$400 million and \$600 million per year," said Rondeau. "That's very considerable. You don't even have to use facilities like this. If people just walked and did things to get their heart rate up it would help. "The amount of money we can save on health-care costs by changing the behaviour of 10 per cent of the population is unbelievable. We need to move fitness into health and make sure exercise is medicine." <http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/reh-fit-centre-gets-top-global-honour-181960991.html>
- the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority recommends lower speed limits for the public health benefits. They note one research study showed that cycling in Bristol increased 12 per cent after introducing 20 mph speed zones. <http://www.wrha.mb.ca/wave/2012/09/whats-your-hurry.php>
- in April 2012, the Toronto Public Health Officer issued a report entitled [Road to Health: Improving Walking and Cycling in Toronto](#) recommended, ... Reducing vehicle speed limits to 30 km/hr on residential streets and adopting a city-wide speed limit of 40 km/hr on all other streets, unless otherwise posted";
- after studying cycling fatalities in Ontario, the Ontario Coroner recommends that municipalities lower speed limits to 30 km/h on many residential streets and to drop the unsigned limit to 40 km/h from 50 km/h <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/lower-residential-speed-limits-ontario-coroner-urges/article4553645/> ;
- Bike to the Future recommends 30 km/hr as the default speed on residential streets unless otherwise posted;
- more cycling means less money leaves the community and more is spent on local businesses. According to researchers with Intelligent Communities, a program of the National Building Museum, only 16 percent of household car expenses stay within the local economy. <http://dc.streetsblog.org/2012/03/23/why-bicyclists-are-better-customers-than-drivers-for-local-business/>
- the European Commission reports that "Widespread and well known are the 30 km/h zones in residential areas." [http://ec.europa.eu/transport/road\\_safety/specialist/knowledge/speed/speed\\_limits/current\\_speed\\_limit\\_policies.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/transport/road_safety/specialist/knowledge/speed/speed_limits/current_speed_limit_policies.htm)

- the European Environment Agency reports that “Lower speed limits on motorways should reduce fuel consumption and pollutant emissions, particularly for passenger cars. Assuming smooth driving (little acceleration and braking), current technology passenger cars and total compliance with speed limits, it is estimated that *cutting the motorway speed limit from 120 to 110 km per hour* would reduce fuel consumption by 12 % for diesel cars and 18 % for gasoline cars.” <http://www.eea.europa.eu/articles/reducing-speed-limits-on-motorways>
- the European Union Transport and Tourism Committee has recommended 30 km/hr speed limits for residential areas, with the specific goal of reducing by 60 per cent the number of children under 14 years old killed by motorists;
- 30 km/hr speed limits are a key component of sustainable travel policies in Denmark, Belgium, Germany the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden;
- there is a major campaign for 20 mile-per-hour speed limits in the United Kingdom <http://www.20splentyforus.org.uk/> ; among other things, they report that when 30 km/h (18.5 mph) zones were introduced in Germany, car drivers on average changed gear 12% less often, braked 14% less often and required 12% less fuel;
- the South Australia Heart Foundation released a report showing that cycling has important economic benefits for businesses over driving, and recommended a variety of measures to promote cycling, including reducing speed limits.

An excellent, detailed report that studies 30 km/hr speed limits is one produced by Copenhagenize Consulting. The report is here: [http://biketothefuture.org/attachments/0000/1844/30km\\_zones\\_copenhagenize.pdf](http://biketothefuture.org/attachments/0000/1844/30km_zones_copenhagenize.pdf)

Here is a detailed entry, including a survey of jurisdictions, on Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zone\\_30](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zone_30)

The above are only a handful of reports, studies and recommendations that can be found quickly and easily on the Internet. Just do a search for benefits of reduced speed limits and ways to promote cycling.

### ***What IS in the report?***

The first sentence in the report is all anyone needs to know: City staff say that the purpose of speed limits "is to facilitate the safe and orderly movement of **vehicular** traffic". The bias is immediately apparent: it seems that City staff believes that the only reason we have streets is for cars (vehicular traffic) and that speed limits must be set to facilitate cars. The report says that speed limits must be set to prevent "driver frustration" and to meet "driver expectations". Frustration **and fear and safety** for cyclists and pedestrians are not even mentioned.

The report suggests that changing speed limits without making any other changes in the road environment is ineffective. The report says that Montreal has reduced its limits and is preparing a guide to design streets to promote reduced speeds. We fully support following Montreal's example of both reducing speed limits and preparing a guide to design streets to promote reduced speeds. We do not believe it is an either/or choice.

The report says that “A posted speed limit of 40 km/h would not reflect the design of the built environment in Winnipeg” and then shows a sample of streets where Winnipeg Public Service has received concerns regarding speeding and as a result conducted speed studies. In all cases below, the 85th percentile speed is approximately 40 km/h even though the posted speed limit is 50 km/h (the 85th percentile speed is considered the operating speed and is the speed at which 85% of vehicles are traveling at or below).” City staff draw from this information that posted speed limits do not impact actual speeds.

The better conclusion to draw is that on residential streets, 40 km/hr DOES reflect “the design of the built environment in Winnipeg”. If 85% of the traffic at these locations are driving at 43 km/hr or less, this show that almost all drivers in these areas consider the built environment is only suitable for 40 km/hr. If Public Works is getting complaints from citizens about cars going too fast in these areas, it is evidence that 50 km/hr is too fast for the built environment.

The report says: “Research has shown that when the majority of motorists travel at the same speed, the likelihood of a collision is minimized. When motorists do not travel at similar speeds, other road users, including pedestrians, will have difficulty judging the speed of approaching vehicles and hence chances of a collision are increased.” And yet at the same time, the report says that the vast majority of drivers in the areas studies are driving 43 km/hr or less. The “same speed” is already set: it is 40 km/hr. This is the speed that is safer.

The report says that motorists should travel at the same speed, recommends that the speed limit should be 50 km/hr, and then says that the City continues to support development of new residential communities that promote lower vehicle operating speeds through design and land use. Which is it? Everyone should travel at the same speed; or it is OK for some neighbourhoods (the new ones) to have lower vehicle operating speeds than the older neighbourhoods. The report is contradictory.

The report implies and invites readers to believe that lower speed limits are actually more dangerous than higher speed limits. This is absurd. The report fails to inform City councilors that:

- At 30 km/hr, 5% of pedestrians struck by a vehicle will die.
- At 40 kph, 25% will die.
- At 50 kph, 55% will die.

The report says: “The desire to reduce speed limits is often based on the decrease in the probability of a pedestrian fatality resulting from a decrease in impact speed. Unfortunately, the above studies suggest that reducing the speed limit in isolation has a very limited effect on operating speed. Without a reduction in operating speed, the benefit of reduced impact speed in terms of reduced collision severity is not realized.” Then the report proceeds to recommend AGAINST measures to reduce operating speeds. Further, the studies cited in the City report were examples of experiments involving changing speed limits at specific sites and within certain neighbourhoods. European experience shows speed limits are much more effective when they apply throughout a city.

The report implies that speed limits make no difference whatsoever. If that is true, then City staff should have no objection to reducing the speed limits.

The report provides a survey of Canadian jurisdictions. The question posed in the survey is confusing: “Has your jurisdiction made an across the board change to lower a minimum or default speed limit of 50 km/h to something lower than 50 km/h?” What would anyone think “across the board change” means? Bike to the Future does not recommend 30 km/hr on every street in Winnipeg, only on residential streets. Why wasn’t the question limited to residential streets? The question seems biased to produce a “no” response. Further, the report tells us about Chilliwack, Red Deer and Milton, but does NOT tell us about Toronto, Ottawa, Hamilton, Vancouver, Victoria, Regina or Saskatoon. The report does not mention any of the jurisdictions surveyed here: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zone\\_30](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zone_30) . Why?

### ***Benefits of reducing speed limits***

Reduced speeds benefits city residents in many ways:

1. A more walkable, livable city with a higher quality of life
2. A healthier population, as more citizens walk and bicycle, resulting in lower health costs
3. More children walking or cycling to school, reducing parents’ “school taxi” duties, reducing traffic congestion near schools, and improving child safety
4. Fewer accidents, reduced severity of injury from accidents, and reduced insurance costs
5. Reduced consumption of gasoline, fewer carbon emissions, less noise, better air quality, reduced infrastructure costs
6. Enhanced social equality: Poorer children are five times more likely to be killed on the roads than their well-to-do schoolmates. 67% of the poorest households have no access to a car

Lower speed limits on residential streets could have a big effect in Winnipeg. Walking/biking mode-share is directly related to the real and perceived safety of a route. Reducing the speed differential between motorists and cyclists increases the safety of cyclists. Many Winnipeggers would like to use their bikes for short trips, but they do not feel safe riding in Winnipeg traffic. So they drive a vehicle instead. Each year, the average Canadian makes 2,000 trips of less than three kilometers by car or truck. These trips could be made by bicycle or on foot. Statistics Canada estimates that there are 400,000 bicycles in Winnipeg. Our annual counts indicate that, on an average summer weekday, 30,000 Winnipeggers commute by bicycle. That leaves 330,000 bicycles ready to replace motor vehicles for short trips!

There is a direct relationship between the walkability / bikeability of a community and its health. Rates of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and many other ailments are higher in communities where people spend less time getting around on their own power. Historically, as our transportation system has been biased to favour travel by motor vehicle, people have become increasingly reliant on motor vehicles. This has made us increasingly sedentary, which has caused increased suffering and health care costs among both adults and children.

### **Winnipeg’s sustainable transportation strategy**

Setting a speed limit of 30 km/hr in residential areas would support the City of Winnipeg’s Sustainable Transportation Strategy’s five strategic goals:

- > A transportation system that is dynamically integrated with land use
  - > A transportation system that supports active, accessible and healthy lifestyle options
  - > A safer, efficient and equitable transportation system for people, goods and services
  - > Transportation infrastructure that is well-maintained
  - > A transportation system that is financially sustainable

## Conclusion

This is a flawed, superficial and biased report. The report, after six months, is only three pages long with a one page appendix and fails to mention any third party reports, studies and recommendations that run contrary to the recommendation of the City staff.

While the report addresses “driver frustration” and potential “disrespect” for speed limits, it does not mention “cycling”, “sustainability”, “mode share”, “health”, “active” or “Winnipeg Transportation Strategy”. It treats residential streets as thoroughfares whose purpose is to facilitate vehicles, not as an integral part of where Winnipeggers live. It presents fallacious arguments about safety, and it reports on the experience of jurisdictions that have no experience in city-wide reduced residential speed limits.

The report deals with the short term issue of managing compliance during a transitional period, rather than providing councilors with the information they need to make a long term policy decision about what is best for our residential streets.

The most important information in the City report is this: of the specific city locations studied, 85% of the traffic is already traveling at 43 km/hr or less. What more does City council need to know? The built environment of Winnipeg city streets, and the speed most commonly traveled at, is already 40 km/hr. Making the speed limits 40 km/hr will simply reinforce what most drivers are already doing, and persuade the few who are driving faster on our residential neighbourhoods to slow down.

## Recommendations:

Bike to the Future urges City councilors to reject the recommendation in the report. We urge City councilors to proceed to implement reduced speed limits in residential areas.

We urge the City to adopt a street design guide for other measures that will assist in reducing actual operating speeds.

We look forward to the City’s Bicycling Plan; so that Winnipeg can join most of the other major cities in Canada in having one.

If councilors prefer to have more study, they should commission a balanced study that will include the interests of pedestrians, cyclists, people with limited mobility, school children and that will include a consideration of the various important benefits that come from increasing active transportation. In order to encourage excellence in analysis and reporting, the committee should consider arranging a peer review of the new report by external experts in this field from universities and/or stakeholder groups.

[www.biketothefuture.org](http://www.biketothefuture.org)