

Princeton Traffic Calming Report

Authors

This report was prepared by the Traffic Calming Working Group:

- Town Administrator Sherry Patch
- Highway Department Supervisor Ben Metcalf
- Police Chief Paul Patriarca

Background

In response to resident concerns regarding speeding traffic in several locations in Town, the Selectboard presented two local acceptance warrant articles for voter consideration at the June 11, 2024 Annual Town Meeting and they were unanimously approved. Article 18 established a speed limit of 25 mph inside a thickly settled or business district. Article 19 allowed for a 20-mph speed limit in designated safety zones. Following the Annual Town Meeting vote, the Town Administrator organized a working group consisting of Police Chief Paul Patriarca, Highway Superintendent Ben Metcalf and Transportation Planners from the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) to provide guidance, recommendations and data collection.

Process

Beginning in July 2024, the Working Group held listening sessions with residents to hear their concerns and ideas for traffic calming. The Group met with residents from East Princeton and from Westminster, Mountain, Worcester, Hobbs and Ball Hill Roads. Residents expressed concern regarding speeding vehicles. Many ideas on how to reduce speed were brought up:

- One resident purchased a radar gun and was clocking traffic in East Princeton.
- Another resident was using her vehicle as a pace car to slow traffic down during the morning and evening commute times.
- Other residents suggested speed humps, bumps, or tables
- Increased signage and speed feedback signs were mentioned
- Also discussed was increasing the police presence (and citations)
- Narrowing the roadway and adding beauty with flowering planters was another idea.

The Working Group solicited assistance from CMRPC Transportation Planners with a data driven study. This would help with the development of recommendations that are feasible, sustainable and cost effective. The group met with Transportation Planners, Jeff Howland and Rob Raymond, who recommended that we conduct a “conceptual traffic study” to gather data before conducting a formal MassDOT engineering study. In order to petition

MASSDOT to reduce the speed limit as identified in the MassDOT “Procedures for Speed Zoning on State Highways and Municipal Roads”, a formal engineering study would need to be completed and approved by MassDOT and the Registry of Motor Vehicles. The posted speed would then be set to the 85th percentile as determined by the Speed Study. We were cautioned that the Speed Study could result in an increase in the speed limit, so we decided to proceed with a conceptual study to gather information and determine how to proceed.

What We Learned

MGL Chapter 90, s. 17C-Town Wide 25 MPH Speed Limit

As required, the Town notified MassDOT that we adopted MGL Chapter 90, Section 17C at the 2024 Annual Town Meeting. We were advised by CMRPC Transportation Planners that if a roadway has a legally posted speed limit (Route 31, Route 140, Route 62, Ball Hill Road and Mountain Road), then even if the area is within what would qualify as a “Thickly Settled” or a “Business Zone”, the posted speed limit takes precedence and the 25mph speed limit would not apply.

We were also advised that the Police Department cannot use radar to ticket vehicles within a Thickly Settled zone, but instead must follow the vehicle for 1/8 of a mile before pulling the vehicle over for speeding. The vehicle must be speeding the entire 1/8 of a mile to be considered in violation of the speed restriction.

Also, in order to qualify for Thickly Settled, driveways on one or both sides of the road must be situated on average less than 200 feet apart for a ¼ mile. That works out to 6.6 driveways per ¼ mile.

Signs are required to be installed at the entrances to the Town or at the locations of the Thickly Settled zones to alert drivers that Princeton has adopted the 25mph speed within the Thickly Settled zone.

MGL Chapter 90. S.18B-Safety Zones

Since the Town adopted Chapter 90, section 18B at the Annual Town Meeting, the Town would be required to conduct a full engineered traffic study as outlined in the MassDOT “Procedures for Speed Zoning on State Highways and Municipal Roads. Once the engineering study is completed, an analysis and justification for the reduction in prima facie speeding is required.

The Safety Zone can only be used in areas that truly are necessary for safety such as areas adjacent to a park, trail network, or with high pedestrian traffic. Please note the school zone is only valid when children are present as the purpose is for the safe travel of children to and from school. Childcare Centers do not qualify for a school zone.

In addition, the definition requires that the school has frontage on the road in question and that there is a crosswalk to allow children to cross the road to get to the school.

State Roads

There are no state-classified roads in Princeton. Routes 31, 140, and 62 are old county layout roads. Maintenance reverted back to the Town once the county was disbanded.

Regulatory Speed Limits

Regulatory speed limits have been established on Routes 31, 140, 62, Ball Hill Road and Mountain Road and are posted. A copy of the Special Speed Regulations for these roads are incorporated in the appendix of this report.

Leominster Road has a non-compliant speed limit (30 mph) sign posted.

Boylston Avenue does not have a regulatory speed limit.

Conceptual Speed Studies

CMRPC conducted conceptual speed studies in August of 2024 at the following locations Mountain Road (both directions), Leominster Road, Main Street, Hobbs Road and Worcester Road. Counters were placed for one week and collected speed, time of day, and direction of travel. The Town also collected data on Radford Road and Allen Hill Road.

Data

CMRPC's conceptual traffic study data is included in the appendix.

Findings

Preliminary data from the conceptual traffic studies conducted by CMRPC concluded the following:

80 Main Street/Sawyer Park

Average speed 32 mph in both directions. Northbound (NB) 38-40 mph and Southbound (SB) 39-39.5 mph. 30mph advisory sign is ok.

Hobbs Road

40 mph prima-not thickly settled. 33-36 mph 85th percentile.

Ball Hill Road

Pole #95- 85th percentile 43 mph-45mph. Posted speed 40mph.

Leominster Road

Sawyer Park to Town Line Garage: Thickly settled signs going out and coming in. Signs do not meet criteria. Need to move sign up. 85th percentile 38 mph. Prima facie speed limit 40 mph.

Worcester Road

Posted speed 40 mph. 85th percentile 45-46 mph. **Could result in an increase in the speed limit if engineered study was conducted.**

Radford Road

Average speed 28 mph. 85th percentile 34mph.

Allen Hill Road

Average Speed 27 mph. 85th percentile 33mph.

Recommendations

Potential Safety Zone Candidates

- Westminster Road- Trail Network
- Mountain Road from the blinking light to up to the top of the hill past the library- Common, Pre-school, Church, Library. Heavy Pedestrian traffic.
- East Princeton-Sawyer Park

Engagement-continue to schedule periodic listening sessions to hear residents' concerns and work together on solutions to address issues.

Education-Inform motorists how they can ease traffic impact through behavioral changes and advise them about traffic management activities and opportunities for involvement.

Enforcement-Engage the Police Department to focus traffic and speed enforcement efforts in areas of concern.

Engineering-Combine physical measures to reduce the negative impact of motor vehicles a, alter driver behavior, and improve conditions for pedestrian and non-motorized street traffic.

Goal: To make informed data driven decisions that are feasible, sustainable and cost-effective.

Grant Resource Links

Complete Streets

<https://www.mass.gov/complete-streets-funding-program>

Safe Streets and Spaces

<https://www.mass.gov/shared-streets-and-spaces-grant-program>

Safe Routes to Schools

<https://www.mass.gov/safe-routes-to-school>

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/state-transportation-improvement-program-stip>