



City Council seeks a 20 mph speed limit in Boston

Transit advocates said they support slowing down traffic on city's streets

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A newly installed sign tracks drivers' speeds on Beacon Street. Photo: Nicolaus Czarniecki/Metro

Those getting behind the wheel on city streets would be forced to drive more slowly if members of Boston's City Council can get their way with Beacon Hill.

Councilor Frank Baker on Wednesday filed a home rule petition seeking to reduce the speed limit in parts of the city deemed "thickly settled" from 30 mph to 20 mph, without having to conduct traffic studies and change speed limits street-by-street.

It also calls for a 15 mph speed limit in school zones.

"Probably my number one complaint [from constituents] is, 'How can we get these vehicles to stop speeding on my street?'" Baker said in an interview.

The city can post signs with reduced speeds on individual streets, but does not have the authority to change the default speed citywide. Doing so would require approval from state lawmakers who, safe streets advocates say, have been reluctant to approve changes in the past.

Baker said he was hopeful his proposal would survive the State House.

"You would think that legislators would look at it through a lens where they would say, 'Boston wants to do this. This works for their community,'" he said.

Boston Mayor Walsh last year supported an unsuccessful bill sponsored by State Rep. Liz Malia of Jamaica Plain that would have allowed cities and towns to reduce speed limits to 25 mph.

Walsh has also overseen [a program called Vision Zero](#), which aims to reduce the number of traffic fatalities in the city to zero.

Walsh, in a statement, did not take an immediate position on Baker's proposal.

"Lowering speed limits is one of many tools we are looking at through our Vision Zero action plan to create safer streets in Boston. I look forward to reviewing Councilor Baker's proposal," he said.

Boston's advocates for changes on Boston roadways that support bikers and pedestrians said they back the council's efforts.

"We're very pleased to see the City Council talking about the issue," Wendy Landman, the executive director of [WalkBoston](#), said. "It is the single most important way to reduce the risk of death and serious injury on the streets."

She said the likelihood of being killed or seriously hurt in a crash is significantly lower when a car is traveling at 20 mph, as opposed to 30 or 40 mph.

By WalkBoston's count, there have been five fatal pedestrian crashes in Boston so far in 2016.

"The time is really right for us to get this epidemic of deaths under control," said Kristina Egan, director of [Transportation for Massachusetts](#).

She said the city should also employ "traffic techniques like strategically placed planters and road-markings to keep drivers moving slowly.

"It's really great for the city to take a stand on this," said Jackie DeWolfe, executive director of the [LivableStreets Alliance](#). "Something needs to change. This is one thing that could help."

Lowering speeds, though, is not the only tool the city should be using, DeWolfe said.

"We know it's not just about posting a different speed limit and all of a sudden that solves our problems," DeWolfe said. "This also needs to come in conjunction with infrastructure changes so the street itself enforces it."

City leaders have launched a pilot program to test a 20 mph speed limit in parts of Dorchester and Jamaica Plain.

The pilot is underway in the Talbot-Norfolk Triangle in Dorchester, according to Bonnie McGilpin, city spokeswoman. A second pilot in Jamaica Plain's Stony Brook neighborhood hasn't begun yet, she said.

Speed on Boston streets was in the spotlight this month after an [apparent road-racing crash on Beacon Street in Back Bay](#). One man was injured when the driver of a Bentley jumped a curb, then abandoned the vehicle and drove off in another car, according to police.

The crash brought increased patrols to the neighborhood.