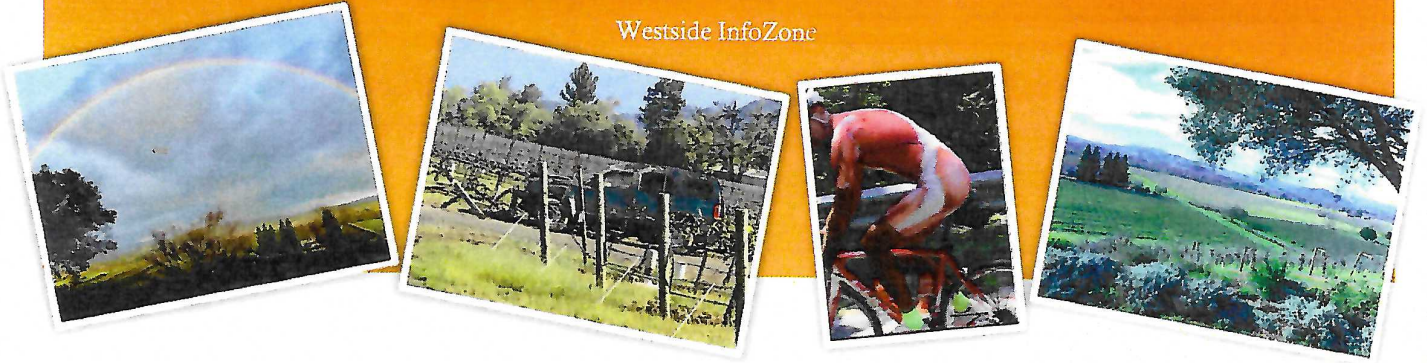


# Traffic Safety Concerns

Westside InfoZone



Prepared by the Westside Community Association Board

Submitted to: Johannes Hovertsz – Director TPW  
Tennis Wick – Director Permit Sonoma  
Supervisors James Gore and Lynda Hopkins

**WCA Requests:** The Westside Community Association (WCA Board) believes that to address public safety concerns, while sustaining our tourist economy, we must act on traffic study findings and reduce public safety impacts on the travel corridors in our concentrated wine regions. Although stretches of Westside are sub-standard for a “rural collector,” the WCA Board is not advocating for solutions that widen or straighten our roads. **Both the Safety Council and the GHD Engineer’s report noted, those types of improvements merely increase the speeding problem. The WCA requests the County:**

1. Conduct physical traffic counts and prevailing speed studies on Westside Road
2. Install “Your Speed Is” electronic monitoring equipment in high-risk areas
3. Reduce speed limit to 40 mph and increase CHP surveillance

## Sources of Expert Opinion:

Source 1) Governor’s Safety Council Report: “Speeding Away from Zero;” - shared with County 2019  
Source 2) GHD Engineering “Dry Creek Traffic Capacity Threshold Study;” - WCA Letter - November 2019  
Source 3: CHP database on injury accidents and DUI-related accidents - ISWITRS 2001 to 2015 for Sonoma County - database shared with County 2016.

## The Research – Our Reality

The research substantiates the Westside Community Association’s position: It is time for County officials to take action on Westside’s speeding problems and high accident rates.

Over the past several years, the WCA continues to request traffic safety support, while the Westside Area experienced: 4 deaths, including our first bicyclist, and about 4-5 serious accidents/ year, many involving neighbors who sustained injury.

2020 may have higher public safety risks: In 1<sup>st</sup> Q alone, Westside had several serious accidents. This summer 1,700 logging truck trips may compound traffic safety impacts for vehicles and cyclists.

GDH found: “...the majority of vehicular/bicycle accidents happen during the summer, between the hours of 1 - 6 pm.” And, “...cumulative (future) travel forecasts indicate that Westside will operate below acceptable service thresholds.” (Source 2)

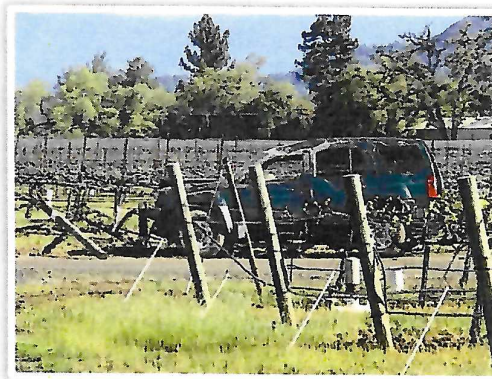
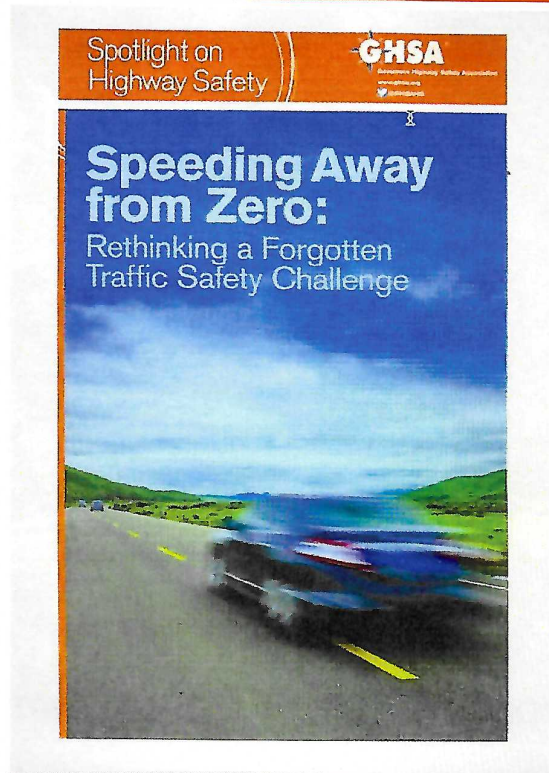
Cumulative impact analyses are needed now. The Westside area lacks traffic counts and prevailing speed studies even though our accident rates are higher than other wine roads.

## Injury Collisions/Mile Driven

### Wine Roads Uniquely Challenged

Sonoma County is blessed with a multitude of rural collector roads; these rural by-ways help define our rural character - an asset valued by tourists.

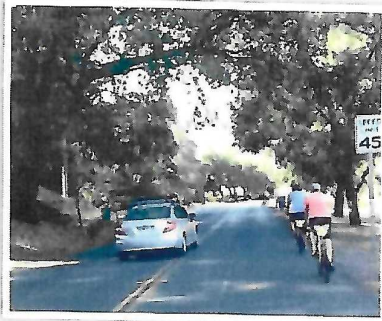
However, our wine roads have “injury collision/ mile driven” rates that trend significantly higher than the County or State-wide rates: Westside is at 56.4% and West Dry Creek, with lower speed limits, rate is 50%. While Sonoma County’s 40% injury collision/mile driven rate is comparable to the state average of 42.5%. (Source 2)



*March 2020 DUI-Speeding – Power Pole Down*



*Eastside Road’s Ghost Bike – bicyclists at risk.*



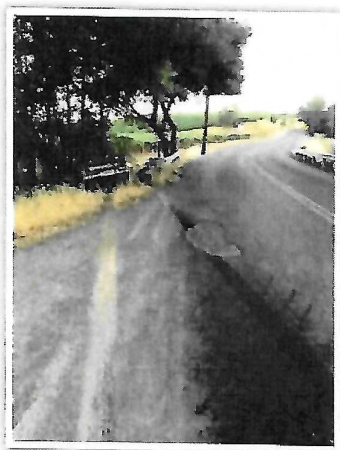
*Illegal passing on blind hills and curves: Westside frequently experiences vehicles crossing into on-coming traffic lanes.*

## Increased Speed = Accidents

From mid-1990 to 2019, Westside had six (6) fatalities, all DUI related. (Source 3) And, in July 2019, a hit and run led to our first bicycle fatality.

Driving too fast for road conditions, especially around blind curves, is a factor in injury accidents. Also, a driver's judgement is key to negotiating curves - cell phone, alcohol or cannabis use impair a driver's perception of their ability to navigate a road, especially at higher speeds. (Source 1)

Research finds that drivers often exceed the posted speed limit by 10-15 mph. And, it's a reinforcing cycle; when engineers increase the speed limit, drivers increase their operating speeds. (Source 1)



*Vehicles passing through the on-coming lane, increases the risk of head on collisions.*

## Sub-standard Road Geometry

GHD found: "With such narrow roads, roadway capacity, operations, and safety are all challenges for the County, for motorists and for bicyclists."

Narrow roads increase the risk of bicycle accidents as cyclists must share the lane: Westside and West Dry Creek roadways range in width from 14 to 24 feet, with either non-existent or narrow [7 feet] edge clearance. (Source 2)



*Vehicle Accidents due to excessive speed – truck high-centered on a 3-foot cement wall.*

## Reduce the Speed Limit

In the past few years, many localities have reduced speed limits to create a safer travel environment. This may be due, in part, to the rise in motor vehicle fatalities since 2015. (Source 1 Page 5)

Speed measuring devices, with a variable message sign, have been found to reduce speeding in high risk locations. A California study showed installation of "Your Speed Is" devices resulted in a 44% reduction in crashes the first year alone. (Source 1)

## High Risk Factors

In the past few years, Westside Road has had five (5) accidents that took out a power pole, and the **8000-block accident started a fire** requiring helicopter crews to extinguish. (Pole strikes: two accidents in the 1000 block, and one each in the 4000, 6000 and 8000 blocks.)

At 10 AM on Friday, 03-27-2020, a driver illegally passed another vehicle on a blind curve barely missing a head-on with a neighbor exiting their driveway. The driver, charged with a DUI, then lost control of their vehicle and took out a power pole.



*When a power pole is hit, there are additional risks of fire and electrocution from downed wires.*

## Highest Levels of Fatalities

Prior to 2015, Westside had the only fatalities on study area roads. (Source 2) In the past few years, there have been several more - many DUI related.

When safety hazards increase, the rural-road tourist experience is diminished. Source 3 (Sonoma County 2001 -2015 data) reveals the risk of fatality from a DUI-related accident is many times greater than fatalities in speeding-related accidents:

- 28,000 speeding-related accidents resulted in 83 fatalities; where only
- 9,000 DUI-related accidents resulted in 244 fatalities



*March 27, 2020 DUI – illegal passing on a blind curve then lost control hitting vines and a power pole.*



## Focus on Public Safety

A 40-mph speed limit would make for a more enjoyable tourist experience, while saving lives. A lower speed limit is justified based on sub-standard road geometry and over 25 commercial winery driveway intersections, many with limited sight distances due to blind curves and blind hills.

Joint road use conflicts are real: Westside Road is a designated bikeway, with bicycles sharing the roadway, per County's Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.

*Address speeding and impaired driving with a 40-mph speed limit and California Highway Patrol surveillance.*