



Committee of the Whole Report

For the Meeting of January 7, 2021

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** December 18, 2020
From: Philip Bellefontaine, Director, Engineering & Public Works
Subject: Motor Vehicle Act Pilot – Reduced Default Speed Limits on Local Roads

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Council:

Direct staff to finalize any outstanding stakeholder engagement, pending approval of resources through the 2021 Financial Planning process, and prepare an application to participate in the Motor Vehicle Act Pilot Program to reduce default speed limits on local roads without a continuous centre line in the City of Victoria from 50 km/hr to 30 km/hr as per the 2019 – 2022 Strategic Plan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lowering speed limits on local streets aligns with the City's Mobility Strategy, Go Victoria, and objectives identified in the Official Community Plan. In its 2019-2022 Strategic Plan, Council identified a 2021 action to reduce default speeds on local neighbourhood streets to 30 km/hr.

Municipalities have authority to regulate the use and enforcement of traffic on roads through their Streets and Traffic bylaw under the context of the "parent" provincial legislation, including the Motor Vehicle Act (MVA). Currently, the blanket, or default, speed limit for local streets within the City of Victoria is set by the Province at 50 km/h unless otherwise posted. Different speed limits are permissible on individual streets, provided signage is posted on every block.

In 2019, the Province amended the MVA to enable pilot projects to research, test, and evaluate new technologies and policies, including options to reduce default speed limits. City staff have evaluated the costs and benefits of achieving Council's speed reduction objective through the Pilot Project model, either on its own or in coordination with several municipalities from across the Capital Region. The pilot would use gateway signage and education, rather than signs on every street, to communicate a lower default speed limit to road users. This represents a more cost-effective and streamlined approach for achieving Council's goal of lowering speed limits on local roads.

Costs for participating in the MVA pilot have been included for Council's consideration as a part of the 2021 Financial Plan process. The Province is anticipated to release a call for applicants early next year. With Council's approval of participation and the required resources to deliver on this strategic priority, the City would apply through this intake to implement a three-year project that would lower the speed limit on local roads without a continuous centre line to 30 km/hr.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to share information and seek approval to proceed with an application to the Province of BC to participate in the Motor Vehicle Act Pilot Program on speed reduction, pending approval of resources in the 2021 Financial Plan.

BACKGROUND

As a part of Council's approved Strategic Plan, there is a 2021 action to lower speed limits on local neighbourhood streets to 30 km/hr. Associated resources for achieving this action have been incorporated into the draft 2021 Financial Plan.

Reducing speed limits has a number of benefits including improving overall road safety and neighbourhood liveability. Slower streets contribute to improved comfort for pedestrians and cyclists and decreased noise levels. Collisions with vulnerable road users at 30km/hr or less correlate with a 10% probability of death when compared to a 30% probability of death at 40 km/hr or 85% at 50 km/hr.

Municipalities have authority to regulate the use and enforcement of traffic on roads through their Streets and Traffic bylaw under the context of the "parent" provincial legislation, primarily the MVA. Reducing speed limits can be achieved under the City's current authority whereby the City designates and installs signage on each individual street. Were the city to undertake the implementation of a lower default speed limit, this would require a significant investment to install new signs on hundreds of streets as well as adding the associated on-going maintenance costs to the City's annual operating budget.

The newly established Motor Vehicle Act Pilot Program enables a municipality to apply to reduce the default speed within its jurisdiction by installing gateway signage, avoiding additional visual clutter in the public road right of way.

Go Victoria Alignment

In 2019 the City adopted its Mobility Strategy, Go Victoria, with a commitment to support increased use of sustainable transportation, improved liveability, and a continued focus on safety for all road users. Go Victoria includes a target to reach and maintain zero annual traffic fatalities and injuries by adopting the Vision Zero model.

Vision Zero is an international approach to improved road safety that prioritizes human life over ease of mobility and convenience and acknowledges the importance of safeguarding people with better roadway design and minimized speed to reduce collision frequency and severity. Lower speed limits can result in both fewer collisions and reduced severity of collisions when they do occur.

It is recognized that most collisions resulting in fatalities and serious injuries occur on major roadways in the City of Victoria, particularly at intersections. Lowering speed limits on local roads is not intended to take the focus away from safety improvements or enforcement at high collision locations or on busier arterial and collector streets, rather it acts as a complementary effort to build a culture of safe mobility and maintain a road network that is designed and operated to prioritize protection of human life.

Speed limit reductions are becoming increasingly common in North American cities and are supported through infrastructure changes and traffic calming interventions. The City continues to make changes to roadways to support vulnerable road users through its annual capital budget including the Complete Streets Program, the Bicycle Master Plan Program and the Traffic Calming Program.

Motor Vehicle Act Pilot Program – Initial Planning

In May 2020, Council directed staff to work collaboratively with other municipalities to explore one or more proposals for the next call under the MVA Pilot Program, including reduced speed limits. Since July 2020, the District of Saanich has been leading a collaborative initiative with several Capital Region municipalities to investigate reducing default speed limits on local streets without a continuous centre line. Several communities (listed below) are anticipated¹ to move forward with a group pilot project to lower default speeds from 50 km/hr to 40 km/hr.

- District of Saanich
- Town of Sidney
- District of Central Saanich
- District of Oak Bay
- Township of Esquimalt

The participating municipalities arrived at this 40 km/hr speed limit pilot based on assessment of their current speed profile as well as support or formal direction from their individual Councils. There is no interest among these participants to pursue a lower speed limit pilot at this time.

All elements of a Motor Vehicle Act Pilot must be planned for, delivered, and resourced by the participant. There are four major stages:

1. **Pre-Planning:** This stage is largely complete and focused on understanding resource requirements, undertaking initial engagement and communications, conducting a bylaw review and considering evaluation requirements.
2. **Application:** This stage involves the City formally applying to the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure with a proposal to deliver a specific speed reduction pilot project. Under the model, Cabinet is required to approve an Order in Council (OIC) for the pilot to proceed. Projects must meet all requirements of Part 13 of the Motor Vehicle Act and be consistent with the Provincial Government's objective of supporting active transportation.
3. **Preparation:** This stage focuses on preparation including a new signage plan, a comprehensive communication and education campaign, and data collection plan.
4. **Pilot Period:** This stage focuses on the delivery of the three-year pilot itself. There are annual monitoring requirements and a formal evaluation at the beginning of year 3.

Based on information available at this time, there is nothing that prohibits Victoria from applying and delivering its own speed reduction pilot that is separate from other local governments in the region.

¹ Staff discussions and/or Council decisions, where made by December 15, 2020

ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

Speed Profile

As a part of the process described above, City staff have gathered baseline data to assess current conditions measuring the 85th percentile speed. This is the speed at or below which 85% of all vehicles are observed to travel under free-flowing conditions. Given Victoria's land use, density, and network characteristics, 85th percentile speeds are typically lower than that of other CRD municipalities, particularly those in suburban or rural settings.

As a comparison, typical 85th percentile speeds within the District of Saanich are an average of 46 km/hr in 50km/hr zones. Within the Town of Sidney, vehicle speeds are closer to 40km/hr while in Victoria, it is 38km/hr. Not all roads are the same however, and there is a range of recorded speeds on local streets in different neighbourhoods with some higher and some lower. Should the City pursue a Motor Vehicle Act Pilot, annual data collection will be a requirement.

Engagement Process

The 2019 – 2022 Strategic Plan was informed, in part, through the 2019 Engagement Summit which brought together 150 community leaders to share ideas, learn and reflect on proposed objectives and actions developed by Council.

More recently, the City participated in a regional engagement process, led by the District of Saanich, from September to November 2020. Regional stakeholders were consulted by the District of Saanich, while the City of Victoria was responsible for outreach to local partners.

The regional engagement process focused on gathering feedback from organizations including the CRD Traffic Safety Commission, police and emergency services, school districts and parent advisory councils, active transportation groups, road safety partners, and other agencies, such as ICBC, BC Transit and the Capital Regional District.

Regional input was collected through virtual meetings as well as written correspondence. Public engagement findings suggested:

- A consistent, predictable and coordinated speed limit approach across the entire region would yield maximum compliance and support.
- There was general support for the need to reduce speeds. Some stakeholder groups expressed a desire to see speed limit reduction, specifically to 30 km/hour.
- Specific considerations related to implementation included:
 - The need for public education, continued public engagement, and clear signage.
 - Expectations around enforcement and clear definitions and authority vested within the Motor Vehicle Act.
 - Questions about what data exists, what specifically will be collected and the need for adequate data during a pilot period.
- Some stakeholders have identified opportunities to participate in the pilot and partner in data collection.

Locally, the City of Victoria consulted with stakeholders through an on-line survey and invited neighbourhood associations and other agencies not covered in the regional dialogues to contribute. The City did not specifically consult on a 30km/hr reduced speed limit but gave the opportunity for open comments. The City received 130 emails and over 200 survey responses during this period

in addition to the regional comments and feedback. The detailed local engagement summary can be found in Appendix A and email submissions in Appendix B.

Findings from the City's efforts suggested stakeholders were either in favour of lower speeds or against them. While some comments articulated a preference for certain speed limits, most comments were related more to the principle of reducing the default speed limit. Themes included:

- Support for the safety benefits for vulnerable road users, specifically pedestrians, cyclists and children.
- The need for proper education and enforcement to support compliance.
- Concern for increased traffic congestion and travel times.
- Support for engineered investments in traffic calming to compliment reduced speeds.
- Concern about potential "road rage" from slower speeds on local roads.

Survey respondents in support of lower speeds commented on the sense of safety and quality of life benefits. Survey respondents opposed to any speed limit changes expressed concern for increased traffic congestion and required resources required to implement changes. The City's Active Transportation Advisory Committee continues to remain in support of reduced speed limits.

Education and Communications

Any changes to default speed limits in the City of Victoria will require coordinated, consistent and comprehensive education and road user awareness. Agency partners, such as ICBC, BCAA, School District 61, and Island Health will play important roles in sharing information. Costs for planning and delivering a comprehensive education and communication strategy has been identified in the draft 2021 Financial Plan considerations.

Enforcement

Victoria Police have been engaged in both regional and local dialogue on speed related pilot projects. Existing police resources dedicated to traffic safety within the City of Victoria are focused on areas of highest risk to public safety – such as distracted driving, impaired driving, intersection enforcement, and excessive speeding. Should the City pursue a speed reduction pilot on local streets, enforcement activities would continue to be focused on high-risk locations and behaviours. A significant component of the pilot would be encouraging behaviour change through education and encouragement.

OPTIONS AND IMPACTS

Lowering speed limits in the City of Victoria will require resources for planning, implementation, monitoring, outreach and assessment. Both Option 1 and Option 2 include respective bylaw changes, a speed limit harmonization strategy to reconcile posted limits that are not consistent with this approach, as well as deliver education and data collection.

Both Options also anticipate that the City will continue to undertake its annual traffic calming program.

Option 1: Direct staff to finalize any outstanding stakeholder engagement, pending approval of resources through the 2021 Financial Planning process, and prepare an application to participate in the Motor Vehicle Act Pilot Program to reduce default speed limits on local roads without a continuous centre line in the City of Victoria from 50 km/hr to 30 km/hr as per the 2019 – 2022 Strategic Plan. (RECOMMENDED)

Under this option the City would apply to undertake a MVA Speed Reduction pilot on its own. All costs to plan, implement and evaluate the pilot would be born by the City. Road user education and awareness would be largely the responsibility of the City.

Option 2: Direct staff to finalize any outstanding stakeholder engagement, pending approval of resources through the 2021 Financial Planning process, and prepare an application with other interested local governments to participate in the Motor Vehicle Act Pilot Program to reduce default speed limits on local roads without a continuous centre line in the City of Victoria from 50 km/hr to 40 km/hr.

Under this option the City would apply to undertake MVA Speed Reduction pilot with a group of participating municipalities from the Capital region. All costs to plan, implement and evaluate the pilot would be born by the City. Road user education and awareness efforts would be shared among participants.

Official Community Plan Consistency Statement

Lowering speed limits on local roads is consistent with the Official Community Plan under Goal 7: Transportation and Mobility (7A, 7B and 7C) and Goal 15: Community Well-being (15F and 15G)

Accessibility Considerations

Reducing speed limits can improve the comfort of people with disabilities including those with mobility challenges, hearing or vision loss when using sidewalks and crosswalks. Stakeholders with disabilities will continue to be stakeholders through the process to evaluate lower speed limits on local roads should a pilot project be pursued.

Financial Plan Considerations

The transportation projects included within the 2021 Financial Plan are largely related to on-going asset management, road safety and the promotion of mobility options and staff have the capacity to deliver them.

As a part of the Strategic Plan development process in 2019, staff provided an initial assessment of required resources to deliver each action item. At the time, costs of delivering a municipal wide speed reduction project were estimated at \$520,000. Updated resourcing requirements in the 2021 Financial Plan now reflect a streamlined MVA Pilot process to complete this action, totalling \$315,000 over 3 years. This includes all costs of implementation, education, and data collection with the support of a dedicated two-year FTE within the transportation division. Of this, \$135,000 is required in 2021, \$160,000 in 2022 and the remaining \$20,000 in 2023.

SUMMARY

In its 2019-2022 Strategic Plan, Council identified a 2021 action to reduce default speeds on local neighbourhood streets to 30 km/hr. Lowering speed limits on local streets aligns with the City's Mobility Strategy, Go Victoria, and objectives identified in the Official Community Plan.

Reducing speed limits has a number of benefits including improving overall road safety and neighbourhood liveability. The Motor Vehicle Act Pilot Program is the most cost-effective and streamlined approach to achieving this Strategic Priority and can be delivered in coordination with capital investments that continue to improve road safety and support vulnerable users.

Respectfully submitted,

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Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager.

List of Attachments

Appendix A: MVA Speed Reduction Pilot Engagement Summary

Appendix B: Email Submissions