

SLOWING DOWN FOR KIDS: NEW LAW ALLOWS LOCAL GOVERNMENT TO LOWER SPEED LIMIT IN SCHOOL ZONES TO 15 MPH

Guide for parents: How to implement AB 321

On January 1, 2008, a new law took effect that allows local government to lower the speed limit at certain schools to 15 mph and extend the school zone to 1,000 ft each way from the school property: AB 321, authored by Pedro Nava. The law amends section 22358.4 of the California Vehicle Code. In order to qualify, a school has to be located in a residential district on a two-lane road with an existing speed limit of 30 mph. or less. For such schools, a city or county may, by resolution, establish the 15 mph speed limit in the area up to 500 ft from the school when children are present and erect the appropriate signs. In the extended school zone, up to 1,000 ft away, the speed limit would be 25 mph.

If you think your school qualifies for the program, do the following:

1. Talk to your principal, superintendent, and PTA. If they agree that your school qualifies, then
2. Contact your local Public Works Department, Transportation Section. Their number may be found in the government section of your phone book. And
3. Speak to your favorite City Council Member or Supervisor.
4. Once the program is adopted by Resolution, make sure school administrations and PTAs educate the parent community about the new program.
5. Encourage law enforcement agencies to enforce the law, but with a warning period.

The reason for this program is simple: Speed kills. At 15 mph, most pedestrians will survive a crash, often sustaining only minor injuries. Yet minor increases in impact speed have a profound effect on crash severity. At 20 mph, most pedestrian crashes result in serious injury, and almost half are fatal. At 40 mph, fully 90% of crashes are fatal. Anything we can do to bring down traffic speeds will enable more children to walk or bike to school safely.

Remember, this law is voluntary. In order to benefit from it, parents and school administrators need to go to their local government and ask them to implement it at qualifying schools. Will your child's school be participating? Talk to your principal, city council or supervisor.

Guide for government agencies: How to implement AB 321

This is what the City of Goleta did to adopt the program. Following is an excerpt from the staff report that led to adoption of a resolution establishing the program within the city.

SUBJECT: Implementation of Assembly Bill 321 for enhanced school zone safety and the change of the Prima Facie Speed Limit

BACKGROUND: On October 10, 2007, the Governor signed Assembly Bill 321, written by Assemblymember Pedro Nava entitled, Vehicles: Prima Facie Speed Limits: Schools (Bill). The Bill will allow for the City to evaluate the speed limits at schools located in residential districts, on two lane roads, with existing speed limits of 30 MPH or less. If the traffic/engineering evaluation indicates that the existing 25 MPH school zones speed limit exceeds what is reasonable or safe, the City may, by Resolution, establish a lower school zone speed limit to 15-20 MPH in the area less than 500 feet from or passing a school building or grounds and extend to the school zone limits up to 1000 feet from school property.

DISCUSSION: This Bill applies only to schools in residential districts, in areas serviced by two lane roads with maximum posted 30 MPH speed limits to and after the school zone. The process for implementing this program is specifically defined by the amended Vehicle Code Section 22358.4 and defined herein:

Area 1: Distance less than 500 feet from or passing a school building or grounds in a residential district:

1. The local authority shall evaluate upon the basis of an engineering and traffic survey, pursuant to Section 627j of the Vehicle Code, that the prima facie speed limit of 25 MPH is more than what is reasonable or safe.
2. Appropriate signs giving notice of the proposed speed limit changes must be posted.
3. By Resolution the City may declare the proposed prima facie speed limit of 15 or 20 MPH whichever is justified as the appropriate speed limit by the traffic survey.
4. Signs shall be erected to indicate the new prima facie speed limit. The sign must indicate that the speed limit is for when school children are present.

Area 2: Distance of 500 feet – 1000 feet from or passing a school building or grounds in a residential district:

1. The local authority shall evaluate upon the basis of an engineering and traffic survey, pursuant to Section 627j of the Vehicle Code, that the prima facie speed limit of 30 MPH is more than what is reasonable or safe.
2. Appropriate signs giving notice of the proposed speed limit changes must be posted.
3. By Resolution, the City may declare the prima facie speed limit of 25 MPH is justified by the traffic survey.
4. Signs shall be erected to indicate the new prima facie speed limit. The sign must indicate that the speed limit is for when school children are present.

The City's Traffic Engineer performed a traffic evaluation at each of the schools within the City limit of the City of Goleta. The traffic evaluation was done in accordance with AB 321 and the provisions of Section 627 of the Vehicle Code were taken into consideration. Each eligible school site was found to be in a residential district with 2 lanes and the speed limit was posted 30 mph or less, which meets the primary criteria of AB 321.

Please let Paula Perotte at paulaperottepta@cox.net know when this law is implemented in your area. Thank you!

