

REPORT

Engineering Services

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council
Date: February 27, 2023

From: Lisa Leblanc,
Director of Engineering Services
File: 05.1035.10
(Doc# 2233490)

Item #: 2023-133

Subject: Extending School Zone Speed Limit Hours

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council receive this report for information.

PURPOSE

To provide Council with initial information relating to the impacts that extending the school zone speed limit hours could have on road safety and City resources.

BACKGROUND

The New Westminster District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC) wrote a letter to Mayor and Council on January 29, 2023 (Attachment #1) asking that the school zone speed limit hours be extended to match those of the City of Burnaby – 7:00am-10:00pm on school days. These extended hours would reflect the fact that schools and school playgrounds are community hubs that attract students and other community groups often in the evening hours and, at times, before the regular school day begins.

DISCUSSION

The provincial Motor Vehicle Act (MVA) specifies that school zone speed limits must be displayed on signs and apply between 8:00am and 5:00pm on school days unless extended times are stated on the signs.

Most school zone speed limits in New Westminster are in effect from 8:00am to 5:00pm on school days as described in the MVA. Some school zones coincide with existing greenways on local roads that have 30-km/h speed limits in effect at all times.

The Transportation Division has a multi-year capital project to improve traffic calming measures around 14 schools throughout the city. Throughout late 2021 and 2022 an array of “self-enforcing” traffic calming measures (i.e. infrastructure that requires motorists to travel at lower speeds to comfortably maneuver), like speed humps and temporary curb extensions, have been installed to encourage lower vehicle speeds at all times. Additional traffic calming measures around schools are planned for construction over the next several years, along with reviews of speed data to assess the impact of these measures on driver behaviour.

As part of this ongoing project, the City hosted a public survey on the Be Heard website in which 213 people participated, either by responding to the questions we posed or by providing feedback in a forum discussion. Throughout the forum discussion, in which 93 people participated, only two individuals mentioned extending the school zone speed limit hours. Those two individuals’ comments received 9 “agrees” and 9 “disagrees” from other people who visited the forum.

As noted in the attached letter from the DPAC, lower vehicle speeds are generally correlated with improved road safety and reduced traffic injuries and fatalities. Self-enforcing traffic calming measures help reinforce the desired vehicle speeds near school zones, but they are not appropriate to install in certain scenarios. School zones that fall on busier roads, like Sixth and Eighth Avenues, also serve as transit and emergency response routes and are therefore not appropriate for certain traffic calming elements like speed humps. Extended school zone speed limit hours on busier roads would then rely mainly on enforcement carried out by the New Westminster Police Department (NWPD).

Other municipalities in Metro Vancouver are also beginning to extend their school zone speed limit hours. For example, the City of Vancouver has theirs in effect 24 hours a day at all times throughout the year, the City of Burnaby is using 7:00am-10:00pm on school days and the Township of Langley has theirs in effect 24 hours a day on school days only. It is important to note that a standard road safety principle is consistent, predictable regulation across jurisdictions to the extent possible. It is generally accepted that the use of standard and predictable traffic control supports motorists in focusing their attention on driving, and minimizes distraction that can result from responding to new or uncommon scenarios.

NEXT STEPS

In response to the letter from DPAC, Transportation staff have requested information from the City of Vancouver, City of Burnaby and Township of Langley to better understand whether there have been any documented improvements to road safety and speed compliance with extended school zone speed limit hours in their respective municipalities. Transportation staff will also contact other Metro Vancouver municipalities to determine if

they are considering or already planning the extension of school zone speed limit hours, and whether there is interest in better coordinating across the region, should the data suggest safety improvements and improved speed compliance as a result of extended speed limit times.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

One objective of traffic calming and reduced speed limits in school zones is to encourage parents and students to choose sustainable modes of transportation, consistent with the City's transportation and sustainability goals.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial implications of extending the school zone speed limit hours would include costs to replace signage along the 37 school zones throughout the city as well as additional NWPD resources to enforce the regulations.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

Transportation staff and NWPD staff collaborate frequently on road safety matters and will continue to do so. Transportation staff have contacted NWPD to obtain feedback on potential extension of school zone speed limit hours and they concur with the implications outlined in this report.

OPTIONS

The following options are presented:

1. THAT Council receive this report for information;
2. THAT Council provide other direction to staff.

Staff recommend Option 1.

CONCLUSION

Extending school zone speed limit hours would have implications on NWPD resources, especially for certain school zones on busier roads where self-enforcing traffic calming measures are less feasible. Further review and research is required to determine the merits and potential unintended consequences.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment #1 – Letter to Mayor and Council from the New Westminster District Parent Advisory Council

APPROVALS

This report was prepared by:
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This report was reviewed by:
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This report was approved by:
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