

**CITY OF SAN ANTONIO
INTERDEPARTMENTAL MEMORANDUM
PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT**

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Thomas G. Wendorf, P.E., Director of Public Works

THROUGH: Terry M. Brechtel, City Manager

COPIES: Melissa Byrne Vossmer, Christopher J. Brady, Albert Ortiz, Andrew Martin, Peter Zaroni, Milo D. Nitschke; File

SUBJECT: School Zone Ordinance Chapter 19, Section 251 Proposed Changes

DATE: September 2, 2004

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This ordinance approves revisions to Chapter 19, Section 251 of the City Code regarding "School zones designated; driving restrictions." The revisions will allow for the following: 1) the establishment of school zone speed limits of 25, 30 and 35 mph in addition to the current 20 mph; and 2) school zone times other than 7-9 AM and 2-4 PM for flashing beacon locations. Current and proposed ordinance language is attached.

Staff recommends approval of this ordinance.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Parents and Northside Independent School District (NISD) officials requested a reduced speed school zone in front of Taft High School. The current City Code does not allow us to designate Culebra Road (FM 471) in front of Taft High School as a reduced speed school zone because the Code requires all school zones to be 20 mph.

Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) performed a speed study on Culebra Road and determined the appropriate speed for this roadway is 50 mph; that speed is posted. In addition, TxDOT recommends a speed differential between adjacent posted speed limits of not more than 15 mph. A 20 mph school zone on Culebra Road would create a speed differential of 30 mph. As a result the City Attorney's Office advised that establishing a 35 mph zone in front of Taft High School would require changes to the existing school zone ordinance.

In an effort to develop recommendations for changes to the school zone ordinance, staff initiated research activities and meetings. Some of these activities included: meeting with school officials from the area school districts, working with San Antonio Police Department and SAFFE officers, completing an evaluation of high school zones across the city and conducting a survey with other cities in Texas and across the country.

The proposed revisions to the school zone ordinance were presented to the City Council Quality of Life Committee in March 2004.

Subsequent to this meeting staff had final meetings with school officials of the following school districts to discuss the proposed revisions:

- East Central Independent School District
- Edgewood Independent School District
- Harlandale Independent School District
- North East Independent School District
- Northside Independent School District
- San Antonio Independent School District
- South San Antonio Independent School District
- Southside Independent School District
- Southwest Independent School District

To date, staff has received affirmative responses from five of the nine school districts and no negative responses.

1) School Zone Speed Limits

Historically, all reduced speed school zones on streets maintained by the City of San Antonio have been established at 20 mph. Although this is satisfactory for streets that have 30 to 35 mph posted speed limits at all other times, on higher speed streets such as major thoroughfares, a large difference in speed can result between faster and slower vehicles. A large difference in speed between vehicles can cause an accident to be more severe; large speed differences are a major factor in non-intersection traffic accidents.

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) recommends no more than a 15 mph differential between adjacent posted speed limits in order to minimize the accident potential created when some vehicles slow abruptly upon entering a lower speed zone and other vehicles do not. According to a 1974 agreement with TxDOT, the City installs and maintains school zone signs on state roadways, with the approval of TxDOT. All numbered roadways, e.g., FM 471 (Culebra Road), US 87 (Roland Ave) and others, are operated by TxDOT and typically have higher posted speed limits. In an effort to minimize large differences in vehicle speeds around schools located on arterial streets with posted speed limits of 40 to 50 mph, a reduced speed school zone should be established with speed limits of 25 to 35 mph, respectively. For that

reason, establishing a reduced speed school zone on a state roadway requires a change to the current City Code.

Adjusting the reduced speed for school zones on major thoroughfares is expected to have these additional advantages: help improve traffic flow during peak travel times; reduce traffic congestion around schools; increase compliance by motorists; and contribute to effective police enforcement of school zones. In addition, reducing the number of vehicles speeding up after passing through the school zone should slightly reduce vehicle emissions.

2) School Zone Times

Language in the current City Code establishes reduced speed school zones between 7-9 AM and 2-4 PM only. These two-hour time blocks, which occur during the peak travel periods, are a “one size fits all” approach and are widely perceived as too broad by motorists. This in turn encourages disrespect of the reduced speed, particularly when children are not present. Motorists are understandably frustrated when cited for violations during these times. Motorists are more likely to respect the reduced speed when a school zone is effective only during times when children are most likely to be present, resulting in greater safety.

The new school zone times will be tailored to more accurately reflect the actual arrival and departure times of students at each school. The proposed change in school zone times will apply only to those school zones that are equipped with flashing beacons, resulting in modified flash times. These modified flash times will be coordinated with the schools and school districts prior to implementation. Proximity to school zones without flashing beacons and proximity to other schools will also be taken into consideration. The time periods for the operation of flashing beacons will be determined based on the school start/end times, geographic location, proximity of different student grade levels to the school zones and other factors to create more responsive flash times.

School zones without flashing beacons will remain in effect from 7-9 AM and 2-4 PM to maintain uniformity and standardization at those locations. In the event that a school zone with flashing beacons is in close proximity to another school zone without flashing beacons, the flashing beacons will operate from 7-9 AM to 2-4 PM until such time that funding is identified to install flashing beacons at the school zone without them. Such an approach will reduce confusion as a result of different school zone times between two closely spaced school zones.

Cities throughout Texas and around the country have successfully used reduced speed school zones up to 35 mph, and modified school zone times, as proposed here. A list of cities contacted is shown in Table 1 of the appendix.

IMPLEMENTATION

1) School Zone Speed Limits

The evaluation of potential new school zones for schools adjacent to higher-speed, state maintained roadways will be the first priority for implementation. Additional school zones may be established after appropriate traffic and engineering surveys have been conducted. Evaluation of existing school zones on higher-speed, City-maintained roadways will be an ongoing process that will occur after the new school zones have been established. Staff will maintain open lines of communication with the community and City Council before any school zone speed limits are changed.

2) School Zone Times

Annually, the board of each school district determines the school year schedule, including the daily start and end time for each school. An engineering and traffic survey by the Public Works Department will determine whether the timing of a flashing beacon at a particular location should be modified. As mentioned previously, all changes to flash times will be coordinated with the individual schools in each school district. It is anticipated that the current two-hour flash times will be reduced significantly. For example, a 7-9 AM flash time may be reduced to 7:15 to 8:15. Approximately 21 different combinations, shown in Table 2 of the appendix, have been developed to match school start/end times throughout the City. The City Traffic Engineer shall specify the time of operation of each flashing beacon for each school zone.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

In general, the changes provided by this ordinance will be transparent to motorists. However, it will be important to inform and obtain cooperation from schools and school districts impacted by these changes. The following outreach effort has been proposed to ensure that notice of changes will reach the appropriate recipients:

City of San Antonio

1. Department of Public Works

- Work with school districts to disseminate information to schools
- Work with various media outlets to inform the public
- Inform school administrators of changes via School Safety Summit and other means

2. San Antonio Police Department

- Work with schools on enforcement during modified school zone times
- Work with crossing guards on implementing changes

POLICY ANALYSIS

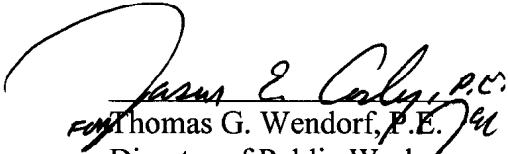
Approval of this ordinance is consistent with Council Policy to promote school and traffic safety.

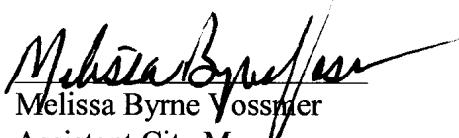
FISCAL IMPACT

There is no direct fiscal impact regarding this proposed ordinance other than additional staff time that may be needed for public outreach.

COORDINATION

This request for ordinance has been coordinated with the City Attorney's Office and the San Antonio Police Department.

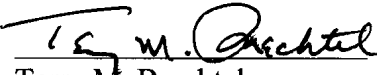

Thomas G. Wendorf, P.E.
Director of Public Works


Melissa Byrne Vossmer
Assistant City Manager


Chief Albert Ortiz
San Antonio Police Department


Christopher J. Brady
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Approved:


Terry M. Brechtel
City Manager

PROPOSED REVISION OF SECTION 19-251 – School Zone designated; driving restrictions

Sec 19-251. School Zones designated; driving restrictions

(a) ~~As a result of an engineering and traffic investigation by the public works department~~ The city council has determined that the prima facie reasonable and prudent safe maximum speed on the public streets and highways of the city designated as school zones and described in separate ordinances of the city may be established at speeds of 20, 25, 30 or 35 miles per hour as a result of an engineering and traffic investigation by the public works department. ~~is Twenty (20) miles per hour.~~

(b) No person shall drive a vehicle on a public street or highway designated as a ***school zone*** at a speed greater than is reasonable and prudent under the circumstances then existing. On that portion of those streets or highways being designated as a school zone, the prima facie maximum and reasonable and prudent speed in miles per hour as posted Monday through Friday when school is in session, shall be such as provided in subsection (a) above, provided that an appropriate sign giving notice thereof is erected. Such signs will have posted time of operation or a sign indicating the prima facie maximum speed when flashing, accompanied by a flashing light. The time of operation of each school zone shall be specified by the City Traffic Engineer. ~~The speed limit of twenty (20) miles per hour on public streets and highways designated by the city council as ***school*** zones between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. in the morning and 2:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. in the afternoon on any day of the regular or any special summer ***school*** term shall be lawful, but any speed in excess of twenty (20) miles per hour shall be prima facie evidence that the speed is not reasonable and prudent and that it is unlawful.~~

(c) It shall be unlawful for any person to drive or operate any vehicle into or through any ***school*** crossing at a time when there is a child or children crossing or standing therein; provided that the said ***school zone*** has been indicated by signs or placards not less than one hundred (100) feet from said crossing, and where such crossings have been established across paved streets its boundaries should be marked by lines of white or yellow paint and no crossing shall be greater than twenty (20) feet in width.

(d) Upon those streets and parts of streets near or adjacent to schools designated as school zones, vehicular traffic shall move only in the direction and during the hours specified when signs indicating the direction of traffic are erected.

(Code 1959, § 38-40; Ord. No. 31666, § 1, 8-14-63; Ord. No. 41504, § 1, 11-22-72; Ord. No. 42075, § 2, 4-12-73; Ord. No. 54506, § 1, 11-5-81)

State law reference(s)--Authority of city to create school zones, Vernon's Ann. Civ. St. art. 6701d, § 167(d).

Schedule A – Twenty (20) miles per hour

Schedule B – Twenty-Five (25) miles per hour

Schedule C – Thirty (30) miles per hour

Schedule D – Thirty-Five (35) mile per hour

Table 1

School Survey

City	Do you customize school zone times?	Do you have one reduced speed limit for all of your schools regardless of regulatory speed limit on street?	If "No", do you adhere to a max. speed differential of 15 mph?
Corpus Christi, TX	no	no	yes
Houston, TX	yes	no	yes
Dallas, TX	yes	yes	-
Austin, TX	yes	no	yes
Richardson, TX	yes	yes	-
Plano, TX	yes	yes	-
El Paso, TX	yes	no	no, 20 mph diff.
Garland, TX	yes	yes	-
Midland, TX	yes	no	yes
McAllen, TX	yes	no	yes
Phoenix, AZ	yes	yes	-
San Diego, CA	yes	yes	-
Sacramento, CA	no	yes	-
Orlando, FL	no	yes	-
Kissimmee, FL	yes	no	yes
Chicago, IL	no	yes	-
Baltimore, MD	no	no	yes
Raleigh, NC	no	yes	-
New York City, NY	n/a	n/a	-
Portland, OR	yes	no	no

Table 2

Suggested Flash Times

Time Periods

1	6:30-7:45 AM
2	6:45-8:00 AM
3	7:00-8:15 AM
4	7:15-8:30 AM
5	7:30-8:45 AM
6	7:45-9:00 AM
7	8:00-9:15 AM
8	11:45 AM -12:45 PM
9	12:15-1:15 PM
10	12:30-1:30 PM
11	12:45-1:45 PM
12	1:00-2:00 PM
13	1:15-2:15 PM
14	2:15-3:15 PM
15	2:30-3:30 PM
16	2:45-3:45 PM
17	3:00-4:00 PM
18	3:15-4:15 PM
19	3:30-4:30 PM
20	3:45-4:45 PM
21	4:15-5:15 PM

AM - one hour

PM - one hour, 15 minutes