



MEMO / NOTE DE SERVICE

To / Destinataire Krista Tanaka, Manager,
Traffic Safety and Mobility File/N° de fichier:

From / Expéditeur Sov Hoeun, School Zone Traffic
Safety Coordinator

Subject / Objet 2021 School Zone Review Update Date: July 23, 2021

Purpose

The purpose of this memo is to provide information on the recent amendment to [Regulation 615](#) of the *Highway Traffic Act (HTA)* and the steps Traffic Services staff are taking to ensure that all school zones align with the new regulations. The amendment allows municipalities to implement reduced school speed zones using designated signs without the use of flashing amber beacons, making school zones compatible with automated speed enforcement. Given the new regulations, Traffic Services staff have evaluated all existing school zones within the City to determine where revisions are required to bring the existing school zones in compliance with *Regulation 615*.

The review also provided an opportunity to assess the evaluation process currently used to establish school zones or school areas on roadways adjacent to schools and provide recommendations for updates as needed.

Background

In Ontario, school zones may be established by a municipality through the implementation of signage indicating a lower speed limit that is only in effect on days schools are typically in session.

As Automated Speed Enforcement (ASE) started being used in various Ontario municipalities, it was identified that though the *HTA* allowed for the implementation of speed cameras in school zones, signage that included flashing beacons or louvered signs was incompatible with the use of speed cameras. The flashing beacons are programmed to operate at times when the lower speed limit is in effect but Provincial Offences Officers reviewing and laying the charge in the Joint Processing Centre, are not able to verify whether the flashing beacons were operational at the time the offense was committed.

On August 28, 2020, the Province amended *Regulation 615* of the *HTA* to include a School Zone Maximum Speed sign. The new sign includes a tab which identifies the times, days, and months serving to inform motorists when the reduced speed limit is in effect. Please see

Figure 1 for a visual representation of the template for the new School Zone Maximum Speed Sign.

These new signs provide an alternative method for signing School Zones which does not require a flashing beacon, making them compatible for use with ASE.



FIGURE 1

Amended School Zone Maximum Speed Sign

Since 2009, Traffic Services staff have been following the process defined in the City of Ottawa [Speed Zoning Policy](#) when evaluating and establishing school zones. School zones determined to be warranted have been established using signage guidelines adopted from the province of Alberta. This included the implementation of part-time reduced speed limits using a customized tab sign that displays the times for when school zones are in effect. Flashing beacons along with “When Flashing/Au Clignotement” tabs were used in place of the effective times tab, where deemed appropriate.

Currently within the City of Ottawa, there are 62 reduced speed school zones covering 72 individual schools. Out of the total reduced speed school zones, 50 are implemented through signage only and the remaining 12 through the use of flashing beacons. The amendments to *Regulation 615* and the introduction of the new signage necessitated the review of these existing school zones to ensure that they are compliant with updated regulations.

Discussion

In 2021, Traffic Services completed a review of the existing school zones to determine where revisions are required to update signage to ensure compliance with the new regulations. After a high-level evaluation, the following types of adjustments were found to be necessary in order to bring the schools zones into compliance with the regulations:

- Modify signage to reflect new sign design;
- Adjust start/end distances from school property limits to within the 150 m distance required under the *HTA*; and,
- Introduce new signage at termination points to end the zones.

Flashing beacons can continue to be used at school zone locations where ASE will not be implemented. If a school site with a flashing beacon is prioritized for the installation of ASE, a review will be conducted to determine whether the removal of the flashing beacon should be undertaken to implement an ASE at this location. As part of the review, staff will consult with the affected Ward Councillor.

During the review, it was also noted that there was a requirement to update the eligibility criteria for school zones included in the Speed Zoning Policy. In order to comply with the *HTA*, school zones may only be implemented on roadways adjacent to schools if:

1. The school property abuts the roadway; and,
2. The main access to the school building fronts the subject roadway.

The decision-making worksheet documented in the 2009 Speed Zoning Policy, includes both of these as weighted criteria when deciding between school area and school zone signage. As both of these criteria must be met in order for a roadway to be considered for school zone signage under the *HTA*, the existing worksheet has the potential for locations to meet warrants that are not eligible under the *HTA*.

Additionally, the review showed that the times of day that school zones were in effect and the amount of speed reduction at the sites were inconsistent across the city. Consistency is important to help reduce the potential for driver error.

It is recommended that a new School Zone Policy be developed to ensure that existing and future school zones are established in accordance with the *Highway Traffic Act* and implemented consistently across the City. The policy will include:

- An update to the eligibility criteria for school zone or school area signage;
- Standardized reduced speed limits within school zone;
- Standardized times and days during which the school zones are in effect; and
- Signage considerations for establishing school zones.

The policy will promote safer communities by helping to enhance the safety of school aged children during drop-off/pick-up and when schools are in session. The consistent implementation of school zones will promote city-wide understanding amongst motorists as to the day/time reduced speed limits are in effect. In addition to enhancing safety and promoting consistency, the utilization of the new signage introduced by the Province will ease enforcement efforts by Ottawa Police and facilitation of ASE.

Financial Implications

Traffic Services staff have completed a high-level review of school zone locations to estimate the cost of upgrading signage to meet regulations. Based on this review, the estimated cost to fabricate, install, relocate, and remove signage is approximately \$73,000 to upgrade the 50 school zone locations that have been implemented through signage only. The cost estimate for upgrading the 12 flashing beacon locations has not yet been concluded as further analysis/information is required in addition to the review that has already been completed. Upgrades to existing school zone locations are expected to be funded through the Road Safety Action Plan (RSAP) in 2022.

Conclusion

The Province has introduced a new School Zone Maximum Speed sign in *Regulation 615* of the Highway Traffic Act. Traffic Services staff recommend that a new School Zone Policy be created to be in alignment with the Highway Traffic Act, new regulations and to promote consistency, ease enforcement efforts, and facilitate the future use of ASE. Due to inconsistent and non-compliant installations, staff also recommend that all existing school zones be reviewed and upgraded according to the new policy. Staff are proposing that upgrades to the existing school zones begin in 2022.