

DATE OF MEETING NOVEMBER 24, 2025

AUTHORED BY MADELEINE KOCH, ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION PROJECT SPECIALIST
SADIE ROBINSON, TRANSPORTATION PLANNING SPECIALIST

SUBJECT **OPTIONS FOR SCHOOL ZONE REGULATION**

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To present the Governance and Priorities Committee with speed regulation options in the vicinity of schools, and to recommend an approach for consideration of lowered speed limits in other high-risk pedestrian areas.

Recommendation

That the Governance and Priorities Committee recommend that Council:

- a. Rescind Council Policy COU-118 (Attachment E).
- b. Adopt the *School Neighbourhood Speed Limit Policy* (Attachment F).
- c. Direct Staff to draft and present site-specific bylaws for speed limit reductions in the vicinity of elementary schools, with a phased approach.

BACKGROUND

On 2024-FEB-12, Staff presented a report to the Governance and Priorities Committee proposing a new *School Zone Signing Policy (2024)* (Report: Attachment B). The report aimed to establish a framework to address several school zone signs in Nanaimo that do not comply with Section 147(1) of the Provincial Motor Vehicle Act (MVA) and are therefore unenforceable. Non-compliance occurs when signs are located beyond a school's immediate property frontage.

At the 2024-FEB-26 Regular Council Meeting, Council referred the matter to the Public Safety Committee instead of adopting the proposed policy, passing the following resolution (Resolution 1):

"That Council direct Staff to present options at a Governance and Priorities Committee Meeting to make enforceable 30 km/h speed limit signs in high-risk pedestrian areas such as near schools."

The Public Safety Committee reviewed the item on 2024-JUN-12 and recommended (Resolution 2):

"That Council direct Staff to continue work on elementary school speed limits, applying 30 km/h school zones where the Motor Vehicle Act requirements can be achieved, and applying 30 km/h regulatory speed limits where those requirements cannot be achieved."

Council adopted this recommendation by consent on 2024-JUN-17. This report responds to both resolutions.

Alignment with Strategic Priorities

The recommendations in this Staff report support the following:

City Plan:

- C2.4.1: Vision Zero: Promotes safe mobility and speed management strategies.
- C2.4.4: Safety Prioritization: Guides interventions based on Walk Score, traffic speed, collision data, proximity to schools, traffic volume, land use, transit access, and socio-economic factors.

Integrated Action Plan (IAP):

- C2.2.9: Update Traffic and Highways Bylaw 5000 to support walking, rolling, cycling, and emerging mobility options.
- C2.4.7: Develop a citywide speed management strategy.
- C2.4.9: Review and update Council policy for school zones.

Active School Travel (AST) Program:

The AST Program supports safe walking, biking, and rolling through the “5 Es” framework: Education, Encouragement, Engineering, Enforcement, Equity.

The recommendations advance Enforcement by improving how speed limits are applied. Aligning speed limits with either the Motor Vehicle Act (MVA) or municipal bylaw ensures they can be legitimately enforced, strengthening compliance and safety outcomes.

DISCUSSION

Resolution 1 – High-Risk Pedestrian Areas

Expanding 30 km/h speed limit considerations beyond traditional school zones aligns with Vision Zero strategies and best practices in other B.C. communities. Staff will prioritize IAP C2.4.7 – a Citywide Speed Management Strategy – for initiation in 2026. This work will enable a comprehensive review of speed management approaches, including the potential for broader reductions in pedestrian-oriented areas. It is anticipated that this work can be accommodated within existing budgets.

Resolution 2 – MVA Non-Compliant School Zones

School zones defined under Section 147 of the MVA are limited to school property frontages (Attachment D). Under Section 146(7) of the MVA, Municipalities may also set speed limits by bylaw (Attachment D). This provides the City with authority to set 30 km/h regulatory limits on nearby streets, enforceable year-round.

Implication	Motor Vehicle Act	Municipal Bylaw
Enforceable by RCMP	Yes	Yes, once bylaw and signage are in place
Times of applicability	8 a.m. – 5 p.m. on school days	24 hours per day, 365 days per year.
Spatial extent	School property frontage only	City-wide (excluding Provincial highways)
Fines	Minimum \$196	Minimum \$138

The previously proposed *School Zone Signing Policy (2024)* (Report in Attachment B) aimed to achieve compliance with the MVA, including the use of advisory “School Area” signs, but did not address additional regulatory measures for high-risk pedestrian areas.

Based on Council and Committee discussion, community feedback through the AST Program, and Vision Zero best practices, this report explores broader regulatory speed limits near schools. This report proposes expanding 30 km/h speed limits around schools through municipal bylaw.

Proposed School Neighbourhood Speed Limit Policy (Attachment F)

The proposed *School Neighbourhood Speed Limit Policy* would:

1. Establish 30km/h regulatory speed limits on roads within a reasonable walking distance to elementary schools.

- Initial analysis will begin within a 400-metre radius (approximately a five- to ten-minute walk) from each elementary school. This reflects a typical walking distance for older elementary students and aligns with the “Drive to 5+” initiative, which encourages families to park or drop off students a short distance from school to reduce congestion.
- The 400-metre area will serve as the starting boundary for assessing adjacent streets and determining where 30 km/h limits are appropriate. Boundaries may be adjusted to reflect site-specific conditions such as road layout, traffic patterns, and pedestrian routes.

2. Adjust boundaries for site-specific conditions

- Boundary adjustments will consider factors such as road class, traffic volumes, pedestrian activity, school access points, and input from partners such as Nanaimo-Ladysmith Public Schools staff.

3. Exclude roads that serve as high-efficiency mobility corridors.

- Reduced speed limits are not appropriate on Arterial Roads; this is discussed further later in the report.
- Within the review area, Collector Roads may be included or excluded from the 30 km/h speed limit depending on the option selected by Council. Under the recommended approach, inclusion would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis to ensure alignment with roadway function.

4. Designate advisory “School Areas” on roads unsuitable for a lowered regulatory speed limit.

Considerations

Application to Arterial and Collector Roads

Arterial Roads function as high-efficiency mobility corridors and are therefore not suitable for a 30 km/h speed limit. Collector Roads serve a similar purpose; however, several are located adjacent to schools.

While reducing speed limits can enhance safety in appropriate contexts, imposing a 30 km/h limit on Collector Roads—designed primarily for efficient traffic movement—may be counterproductive. Research and practical experience indicate that artificially low speeds on higher-capacity corridors can lead to driver frustration, non-compliance, and unsafe driving behaviors such as abrupt lane changes or increased risk-taking, thereby undermining the intended safety benefits. Speed limits should align with the functional design of the road. For this reason, the inclusion of Collector Roads in the reduced-speed program should be considered on a case-by-case basis, taking into account operating speeds, traffic volumes, alternate route availability, and other site-specific factors.

If a Collector Road is excluded from the reduced-speed application, existing school zones along these corridors would be removed, and the standard regulatory speed limit (typically 50 km/h) would apply in front of schools. Staff will conduct site-specific reviews to determine appropriate treatments and place Advisory School Area signs where reduced speeds are not appropriate. When Staff bring forward the required bylaws for each school, Council will have the opportunity to review the proposed bylaw and the recommended application of reduced speed limits prior to adoption.

Attachment G illustrates how the proposed policy would apply compared to the Motor Vehicle Act (MVA) at selected schools—Uplands, Departure Bay, Rutherford, and Cinnabar Valley Elementary Schools—each located adjacent to or near a Collector Road. Two specific examples which reflect application of the recommended approach are highlighted below:

- **Rutherford Elementary School:** Staff anticipate recommending against applying the 30 km/h reduced speed limit on Hammond Bay Road due to higher traffic speeds and volumes, as well as the physical separation of the school by fencing. If the reduced speed limit were applied on Hammond Bay Road, it could undermine traffic flow on this higher-volume corridor, increase the risk of driver non-compliance, and reduce overall effectiveness due to misalignment with the road's function.
- **Fairview Elementary School:** Staff anticipate that Pine Street and Second Street (both Collector Roads) would be included in the 30 km/h speed reduction. These corridors have lower operating speeds and volumes, and the surrounding grid-pattern neighbourhood provides viable alternate routes.

Speed Management Effectiveness

Road design remains the most significant factor influencing driver speed and behaviour; however, infrastructure improvements are costly and time intensive. Research indicates that well-implemented speed limit reductions can significantly improve safety outcomes, supporting Vision Zero objectives.

In addition to the City's Complete Streets Standards, speed management is addressed through the Traffic Calming and Active School Travel programs. Further opportunities for design-based speed management should be explored as part of the forthcoming Citywide Speed Management Strategy.

Phased versus Bundled Updates

- Bundled Approach:
 - Council would receive all proposed amendments for speeds near elementary schools at once.
- Phased Approach:
 - Allows schools currently non-compliant with the MVA and those that have completed AST Planning to be addressed earlier.
 - Avoids waiting for all schools to be ready.
 - Enables early information sharing with AST schools.

Staff will proceed with a phased approach to implement the recommended motion. If Council chooses to include all Collector Roads in the policy, these would instead be presented to Council using a bundled approach.

Community Consultation

No targeted consultation has been conducted specifically for the proposed School Neighbourhood Speed Limit Policy. However, the recommendation was chosen because:

- Feedback from existing policies and community input through the Active School Travel Program indicate that many residents expect school zones to extend beyond immediate school frontages.
- The limitations imposed by the Motor Vehicle Act (MVA) regarding where school zones can be applied are not widely understood by the public.

The recommended option maintains the function of existing school zones by applying reduced speeds near school frontages and extending the 30 km/h limit within a reasonable walking distance from the school (approximately 400 metres). Under this approach, Collector Roads are included where it makes sense to do so—typically in lower-speed, lower-volume neighbourhood contexts where the reduced speed limit can be applied effectively.

In contrast, Option 2 would apply the 30 km/h speed limit to all Collector Roads, regardless of context. This approach may reduce effectiveness in areas where a lower speed does not feel appropriate—such as on higher-functioning corridors during low-activity periods (e.g., late evening). Applying a blanket 30 km/h limit in these situations risks driver frustration, lower compliance, and potential erosion of public support for speed management efforts.

It is anticipated that opportunities for engagement will be included as part of the Citywide Speed Management Strategy project.

Process

If Council adopts the recommended *School Neighbourhood Speed Limit Policy*, Staff will:

1. Apply the policy to each elementary school.
2. Prepare draft bylaws with maps identifying proposed 30 km/h zones.
3. Present bylaws to Council for consideration and adoption, with implementation phased under the recommended option or bundled if Council elects to include all Collector Roads.
4. Install signage consistent with adopted bylaws.
5. Support ongoing enforcement of new speed limits.

Options for Consideration

This report presents one recommended option and three alternate options for Council's consideration:

1. Option 1 (Recommended – School Neighbourhood Speed Limit Policy, includes select Collector Roads in appropriate contexts)
2. Option 2 (School Neighbourhood Speed Limit Policy, includes all Collector Roads)
3. Option 3 (MVA-Compliant School Zone Policy, 2024), using the Evaluation Matrix in Attachment C.
4. Option 4 (Alternate Direction)

Supporting materials are provided to assist Council in evaluating these options:

- **Attachment A** provides a side-by-side comparison of all options, including key differences, advantages, disadvantages, and financial implications (with key differences highlighted for ease of review).
- **Attachment G** provides visual examples illustrating how the options would apply at selected schools.

OPTIONS

1. That the Governance and Priorities Committee recommend that Council:
 - a. Rescind Council Policy COU-118 (Attachment E).
 - b. Adopt the *School Neighbourhood Speed Limit Policy* (Attachment F)
 - c. Direct Staff to draft and present site-specific bylaws for speed limit reductions in the vicinity of elementary schools, with a phased approach.

See Attachment A for Advantages, Disadvantages, and Financial Implications of this option.

2. That the Governance and Priorities Committee recommend that Council:
 - a. Rescind Council Policy COU-118 (Attachment E).
 - b. Adopt the *School Neighbourhood Speed Limit Policy* (Attachment F), which includes all Collector Roads.
 - c. Direct Staff to draft and present site-specific bylaws for speed limit reductions in the vicinity of elementary schools, with a bundled approach.

See Attachment A for Advantages, Disadvantages, and Financial Implications of this option.

3. That the Governance and Priorities Committee recommend that Council:
 - a. Rescind Council Policy COU-118 (Attachment E).
 - b. Adopt the 2024 *School Zone Signing Policy* (Attachment B).
 - c. Direct Staff to apply the 2024 *School Zone Signing Policy* to all school zones not compliant with the *Motor Vehicle Act*, with a phased approach.

See Attachment A for Advantages, Disadvantages, and Financial Implications of this option.

4. That the Governance and Priorities Committee provide an alternate recommendation to Staff.

See Attachment A for Advantages, Disadvantages, and Financial Implications of this option.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Many existing school zones in Nanaimo are non-compliant with the Motor Vehicle Act (MVA) and unenforceable beyond school frontages.
- The report recommends adopting the School Neighbourhood Speed Limit Policy, which establishes 30 km/h limits within a reasonable walking distance of schools and allows select Collector Roads to be included where appropriate.
- Staff will prioritize IAP C2.4.7 – a Citywide Speed Management Strategy – for initiation in 2026. This work will enable a comprehensive review of speed management approaches, including the potential for broader reductions in pedestrian-oriented areas. It is anticipated that this project can be accommodated within existing budgets.

ATTACHMENTS:

- ATTACHMENT A: Summary of Options – Council Consideration
ATTACHMENT B: Staff Report from February 12, 2024, Governance and Priorities Committee
ATTACHMENT C: Evaluation Matrix
ATTACHMENT D: Motor Vehicle Act – Section 147(1) & Section 146(7)
ATTACHMENT E: Council Policy COU-118 – School Zone Signing Guidelines 1995
ATTACHMENT F: Proposed School Neighbourhood Speed Limit Policy (2025)
ATTACHMENT G: Option Implementation Examples

Submitted by:

Jamie Rose
Manager, Transportation |

Concurrence by:

Poul Rosen
Director, Engineering

David LaBerge
Director, Public Safety
|

Bill Sims
General Manager, Engineering & Public
Works