



WHAT WE HEARD: PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT REPORT

Neighbourhood Speed Limit Reduction

August 2024



1. Introduction

The City of Whitehorse identified a strong community desire to enhance safety within residential areas of the transportation network. The City wants to develop permanent solutions to address safety issues by validating concerns, applying engineering best practices, and incorporating knowledge from the experiences of citizens, institutions, and agencies to address the issues.

The City has embarked on two projects happening in parallel: 1) neighbourhood speed reduction and 2) traffic calming. Approached in unison, these projects combine the high-level (speed reduction) and targeted (location specific traffic calming) aspects of effective speed reduction strategies. This report highlights public engagement results of the Neighbourhood Speed Limit Reduction project.

2. Purpose of Engagement

The objective of the public engagement is to ensure the perspectives of residents inform the use of speed reductions to achieve improvements in road safety targets.

Using communications and public engagement, the City designed an engagement process that included education, advocacy, and sought feedback on implementation.

Engagement was intended to foster meaningful discussion, so stakeholders and the community feel their views were considered and incorporated into technical analysis. The resulting technical recommendations will be checked to see how well they meet the input from stakeholders and community members. Finally, the City will report back so that stakeholders understand how their input will be used, if it was used, and why / why not.

2.1. ENGAGEMENT METHODOLOGY

The engagement for Neighbourhood Speed Limit Reductions had two elements: a Champions Collaborative group and Public Engagement.

Champions Collaborative

The City believes that when introducing potential change to a community, people who will be impacted by the change should be involved with its development. The engagement methodology was formed



around creating a group of dedicated community members, committed to creating safe communities through effective and practical traffic safety measures for Whitehorse. This group, known as the Champions Collaborative, while not a decision-making body, played a leadership role in championing road safety in Whitehorse. The group of 18 citizens had two meetings. Their involvement in the planning for Neighbourhood Speed Limit Reduction increases the likelihood of acceptance of the proposed solutions. The group acknowledged that Neighbourhood Speed Limit Reduction has the potential to create a movement dedicated to traffic safety, fulfilling the desire to enhance safety within residential areas of the transportation network.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."
Margaret Mead

Public Engagement

The City also wanted to connect with the public and gauge their reaction to Neighbourhood Speed Limit Reduction. "Go to where the people are" was used to attract participation through a public event held at the Fireweed Community Market. Displays, activities and prizes for children attracted crowds of citizens who offered their perspectives and shared their preferences for speed limit reduction initiatives in Whitehorse.

3. Engagement Results

3.1. CHAMPIONS COLLABORATIVE ON ROAD SAFETY

During the first meeting, Collaborative members expressed their strong belief that speed limit reductions, particularly if using traffic calming to slow speeds, need to be incorporated into initial road network design. There was strong interest in engineering solutions that reinforce speed reductions. Members acknowledge that lack of law enforcement is an issue, and even increased enforcement is not a sustainable solution. Members expressed feeling unsafe traveling on several streets throughout Whitehorse and suggested that a mix of approaches was important to improve safety, e.g., signage, consistency, roadway engineering, education.

"All residential neighbourhoods should have a uniform speed. When reducing speed limits in neighbourhoods, there should be a consistent speed throughout the neighbourhood."

Participants were also invited to create a set of principles that could be applied to decisions aimed at increasing road safety. At the second meeting participants supported principles that could be applied when determining speed limit reduction actions:



Safety as a Right: Citizens and visitors have a right to safe travel with no fatalities or serious injuries. Everyone deserves the chance to survive or experience a better outcome in the event of a vehicle collision.

Streets are Community Places: Streets are not only about movement, they are also places for people use. Safety must be prioritized over traffic flow and speed.

Consistency and Equity: Speed limits should be consistent across all Whitehorse communities rather than only in select communities.

Simple and Intuitive: Design of streets and pathways should make sense and be easy to understand for all users.

Options for Travel: All neighbourhoods should have safe travel options for all people regardless of if they walk, ride a bike, ride transit, or drive.

There was also lively discussion about whether speed limits should be reduced to 40km/h or 30 km/h. Most people supported reducing the speed limit to 30km/h.

"I like the idea of 30km/h; it is obviously the safest choice. At 30km/h, people would speed to 40km/h. If you set it at 40km/h, people would go 50km/h and there would be no change."

Others thought that 30km/h would be a hard sell and get significant pushback. They thought that 40km/h represented a compromise.

"I think 30 is safer. But 40 would be more acceptable publicly. I'd rather see 40 than leaving it at 50 if there's pushback."

"30 is safer but 40 is better than 50. 40 is more palatable politically and socially"

Discussion turned to 'doing what is right vs. doing what is convenient' and 'doing what was preferred vs. doing what would be palatable.' People urged the City to take advantage of the neighbourhood speed limit reduction initiative to implement real change and to not squander the opportunity by taking a softer approach.

"The message I heard was that reducing the speed limit in residential areas to a level from 50km/hr to 30 km/hr would not be palatable from the political point of view and that a compromise to only reduce the speeds to 40 km/hr would be an acceptable proposition. This is entirely a spineless suggestion that will only serve to prolong the endangerment of everyone who chooses active transportation and encourage the unsustainable use of the automobiles for any and every trip no matter how short."



Although there were requests for consistency in speed limits across the city (rather than being varied depending on the neighbourhood) member suggested that special consideration be given to country-residential areas.

"I was happy to see that if there was reduction in speed limit that it's to include the entire city. We've been getting feedback to lower the speed limit and we have had people message me or tell me in person to lower the speed limit consistently across the board."

"There has been discussion on how country residential areas may have a reduction that would not be as relevant or fitting as in residential neighbourhoods in an urban setting. So, hoping there could be two different zones identified where there's different speed limits for urban versus rural residential."

The Champions Collaborative also guided the planning of the public event, suggesting dates, times, venues and approach.

The Champions Collaborative developed the principles for speed limit reduction and set the stage for bold and meaningful discussions on road safety in Whitehorse. Their participation was invaluable.

3.2. PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE AT FIREWEED COMMUNITY MARKET

Several hundred people attended the very popular Fireweed Community Market on June 6. The City of Whitehorse had an info tent featuring Neighbourhood Speed Limit Reduction and Traffic Calming information, with the predominant focus on speed limit reduction. Representatives created display boards and activities to gather people's viewpoints and preferences on speed limit reduction initiatives. Well over 100 people shared their thoughts, and 91 people 'voted' for their preferred speed.

There was very strong support for speed limit reductions, with 30km/h in all residential areas being the top preference in conversations and in activities. People shared their concerns with the amount of speeding in Whitehorse and were willing to consider lowering speed limits as well as implementing traffic calming measures in communities. People identified speeding 'hot spots' on a large map of the Whitehorse. There were repeated concerns about Falcon Drive, Alsek Road, Nisutlin Drive, Wilson Drive, and 2 Mile Hill Road.

*"Big wide streets end up being a thoroughfare" [Falcon Drive]
"Speed reduction required! So dangerous! – 30km/h please." [Hamilton Boulevard]
"Egregious speeding on Wilson Drive, like >75km/h!"
"Curve is way too fast" [Wilson Drive curve near Hayes Crescent]
"People race here!" [Falcon Drive, North Star Drive]*



To track people's preferences for speed limits, a display board was set up that outlined four choices. Team members defined local streets and collector streets to those that were unfamiliar with the terms.

Local and Collector Streets:

- o Provide access to homes, parks, and schools
- o Have speed limits of 30, 40, or 50 km/h currently

Arterial Streets and Highways:

- o Connect neighbourhoods together and are used to travel across the city
- o Have speed limits of 50, 60, 70, 80 km/h (or higher for highways)

People were invited to place a sticker next to their preferred speed limit choice. The four choices were:

A. 30 km/h Residential Streets in all neighbourhoods - consistent with school zones and some residential neighbourhoods that are already posted at 30 km/h (i.e., Takhini, McIntyre) - consistent with best practices related to survivability if a person walking is hit by a vehicle

B. 40 km/h Residential Streets in all neighbourhoods - consistent with some neighbourhoods that have been reduced to 40 km/h (e.g., Downtown, Hillcrest, Whistlebend) - School zones are still needed, and some neighbourhoods may have speeds increased to be consistent

C. 30 km/h on Local Streets and 40 km/h on Collector Streets (Urban Areas only) - 30 km/h on local streets and 40 km/h on collector streets - More signs required and lacks consistency

D – 30km/h on Local Roads, 50km/h on Access Roads (Country Residential Areas Only)

The results of the polling exercise:

Scenario	Star Stickers
A – 30km/h Residential Streets in all Neighborhoods	46
B – 40km/h Residential Streets in all Neighborhoods	30
C – 30km/h on Local Streets, 40km/h on Collector Streets (Urban Areas Only)	12
D – 30km/h on Local Roads, 50km/h on Access Roads (Country Areas Only)	4

Children were also invited to place a marble in the pot representing 30km/h or 40km/h

Residential Speed Limit Scenario – Children's Preferences	Marbles
A – 30km/h	22
B – 40km/h	18

Participants at the Fireweed Community Market had a strong preference for reducing speeds in residential areas to 30km/h, often citing safety, especially for children and pedestrians. While many support 30km/h, others find it too slow and prefer 40km/h, emphasizing the need for balance and more enforcement. Some people felt that enforcement was unlikely, and therefore it was safer to go with a slower speed recommendation. Like the Champions Collaborative, participants at the Market suggested that while they would prefer 30km/h, there may be less resistance if the speed limit was set at 40km/h rather than 30km/h. Traffic calming measures such as speed bumps and road design changes were also widely supported to enhance safety.

"I prefer 30km/h but I think it might be unrealistic."

"30km/h on certain streets feels very slow, but too fast on others. I'm glad you are doing this, I want my neighborhood to go to 30km/h. We need education, people don't understand the signs."

"I like 30km/h. People will speed anyway. Downtown is 40km/h and people go 50km/h. Slow is better. Make it 30km/h, kids are unpredictable."

There were dozens of comments on specific areas that would benefit from speed limit reduction and suggestions for areas that could be monitored for traffic calming measures if speed limit reduction did not result in a change in driver behaviour. These locations have been passed on to the technical team as information.

Several comments strongly supported speed limit reduction:

- 40km/h is a compromise
- I support the road safety changes—30km/h is my choice
- Only on residential streets! Not on arterials
- 40km/h so the 30km/h zones are noticed
- Great to reduce speed limits to 30km/h!
- When in doubt, physics. Slower is better
- I love this for my neighborhood! Reduce speed in residential areas!
- Lower speeds, extend playground zones to every street
- Keep everything at 30km/h.

Even though most people wanted 30km/h, they were concerned that there may be resistance to that, so suggested a compromise of 40km/h would suffice. Others were vehemently opposed to compromising for 'political expedience' and urged the project team to follow best practices for human safety

"Driving here is hazardous. My husband got hit and died in a marked crosswalk downtown. So, for me 30km/h. We need enforcement too."

"I feel that the engagement and the planning intentions do not go far enough to provide a safe environment for all road and street users, especially the most vulnerable that stand to lose most when conflict between cars and active transportation occurs."

"I believe tiptoeing around speed reductions for political reasons is misguided and weak."

"I plead that you refine your recommendations to the City of Whitehorse to take a hardline and to implement all measures necessary to reduce the speeds in all urban residential and downtown areas to 30 km/hr or less. Anything short of this is prioritizing automobile convenience over the safety of those not inside an automobile and over livability of our neighbourhoods and our city."

4. Next Steps

The project team will review the feedback from the Champions Collaborative and public engagement and factor those considerations into their recommendations to the City of Whitehorse.

