



ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
AND AUTO SAFETY



May 24, 2006

Ric Williamson, Chairman
Texas Transportation Commission
125 East 11th Street
Austin, TX 78701-2483

Dear Mr. Williamson:

A national newspaper account last week indicates that your commission is considering approving a proposal by the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) to raise the maximum speed limit on two Texas interstate highways to 80 miles per hour (mph). We are writing to express strenuous objections to such a decision and to recommend that you fully consider the highway safety implications and reject TxDOT's proposal.

The adage, "history repeats itself" will certainly ring true in Texas if these higher speed limits are allowed. You are no doubt aware that deaths rose dramatically in Texas following the repeal of the National Maximum Speed Limit (NMSL) in 1995 when your state became one of the first to take advantage of that new authority. There is every reason to believe the same unnecessary destruction of life will happen again if limits are posted in Texas at an all-time, current national high of 80 mph.

Basing such a potentially deadly decision on data from TxDOT that most drivers on affected highways are currently clocking 76 – 79 mph, so you might as well make it legal for them to speed, would be ludicrous if it weren't so serious. According to expert research by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and numerous other credible sources, deaths go up when speed limits are raised. The higher the speed limit, the more cars will excessively speed, and the more people will be killed and injured on Texas roads. By now, after more than 30 years of experience raising and lowering speed limits in this country, this is also common knowledge.

As a nation, we have made some good progress in highway safety throughout the years, particularly by increasing seat belt and child safety seat use, significantly reducing the number of pre-1980 alcohol-involved fatalities, and assuring air bag protection as standard equipment in new cars. Speeding, however, has been a nemesis on our nation's roadways, one of the major reasons why the overall national death toll is stuck at well over 42,000 every year.

Especially since the NMSL repeal, speeds have increased in every state, and speed-related deaths have risen. **Thirty-nine percent (39%) of fatal crashes were speed-related in Texas in 2004, nearly 10 percentage points higher than the national**

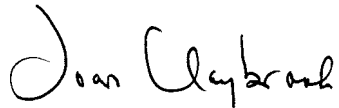
average. Put another way, of the 3,583 people killed on Texas roads in 2004, nearly 1,400 died in speed-related crashes. These types of crashes cost the state nearly \$3.5 Billion in the year 2000 alone. More graphically, think how many of the thousands of lives lost since 1995 in Texas in speed-related crashes would never have happened had speed limits not been raised.

Should you ignore our recommendation and proceed instead to repeat deadly history in the state of Texas by, yet again, boosting limits on some portions of interstate highways to record highs, you will be making a dangerous, deadly and irresponsible decision. Such a misguided policy treats with contempt the mission of the Texas Department of Transportation: "To provide safe, effective and efficient movement of people and goods."

Sincerely,



Judith Lee Stone, President
Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety



Joan Claybrook, President
Public Citizen