

# Traffic Frequently Asked Questions

Can you put a crosswalk at my corner?\_

Can you post a lower speed limit on my street to slow traffic down?\_

Can you place stop signs in my neighborhood to slow traffic



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## Can you put a crosswalk at my corner?

The California Vehicle Code (CVC) defines crosswalks as the part of a roadway that is an extension of the walkways or sidewalks at the intersection. Unless there's a sign saying not to cross the street there, the crosswalk already exists.

Not all crosswalks are marked, though. That's for a good reason: studies have shown that pedestrians at intersections where there are no stop controls or traffic signals are more likely to be struck by a vehicle while in a marked or painted crosswalk than in an unmarked crosswalk. The reason apparently is that marked crosswalks may give pedestrians a false sense of security, believing that motorists will yield to them.

Crosswalk markings are used to guide pedestrians to an appropriate crossing location. The markings are not nearly as visible to an approaching motorist as they are to the pedestrian, so their utility in warning motorists of the existence of pedestrians is very limited. At intersections without stop signs or traffic signals (uncontrolled intersections) where it's obvious where pedestrians should cross, crosswalks probably shouldn't be marked.

## Can you post a lower speed limit on my street to slow traffic down?

Actually, placing a lower speed limit on your street wouldn't slow traffic. Three widely held misconceptions about speed limits are:

1. Speed limit signs will slow down traffic.
2. Speed limit signs will decrease accidents and increase safety.
3. Raising a posted speed limit will increase the speed of traffic.

Several transportation studies have consistently shown that there are no significant changes in average vehicle speeds following the posting of new or revised speed limits. Similar research has found no direct relationship between posted speed limits and accident frequency.

Here's how it works: The California Vehicle Code (CVC) governs the establishment of speed limits. California, like all the other states, bases its speed regulations on what is called the Basic Speed Law: "No person shall drive a vehicle at a speed greater than is reasonable or prudent and

in no event at a speed which endangers the safety of persons or property” (CVC 22350). The CVC then requires what is called an “engineering and traffic survey” to be conducted to determine the proper speed limit on a road. One of the items examined in the engineering and traffic survey is the normal pace of free flowing traffic under normal conditions – a measurement based on the basic speed law.

Speed limits established without the support of an engineering and traffic survey are labeled by the CVC as a “speed trap”, and enforcement agencies cannot use radar to help them enforce the speed limits there. As you can imagine, that takes away a very valuable tool from the enforcement agencies, and prevents adequate enforcement of any speed in a speed trap. The end result is that posting a lower speed limit without legal justification will not slow the traffic and probably will severely reduce any enforcement of the speed limit that’s already on your street.

### **Can you place stop signs in my neighborhood to slow traffic?**

The Federal Highway Administration’s (FHWA) Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) has criteria for installing signs and thus creates uniformity from state to state. The MUTCD specifically says, “Stop signs should not be used for speed control”. Consistent use of traffic control devices protects the clarity of their messages. As stated in the Manuals, uniformity must also mean treating similar situations in the same way, so every motorist understands what is expected of them, and the control devices are respected.

A vehicle, if it stops at the stop sign, certainly is going slower than it was. However, there have been many studies that show speeds actually increasing between intersections as drivers make up for lost time. These studies have also shown that stop signs intended to be a nuisance or inconvenience for drivers to get them to slow down or switch routes are very often intentionally violated. That can be particularly dangerous if someone entering the intersection expects the driver to stop.