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QuickPoint! – The Greatest Challenge to Traffic Safety? It’s Not Residential Speed Limits

By John A. Charles, Jr.

Earlier this week [the Oregon House of Representatives passed HB 2682](#), which will allow Portland to lower traffic speeds on residential streets from 25 MPH to 20 MPH. This was hailed as an important step towards reaching the city’s goal of zero traffic fatalities by 2025, but in reality the bill is mostly symbolic.

First, HB 2682 only affects residential streets. Most traffic fatalities occur on higher-speed arterials.

Second, reducing travel speed is just one of many factors in traffic safety, and not always the most important. According to the [2015 Portland Traffic Safety Report](#), 54% of fatal crashes involve alcohol or drugs. When pedestrians are involved, 30% of fatalities involve either an intoxicated walker or driver.

Traffic speed is a factor, but 80% of Portland’s fatalities and serious injuries occur on the 19% of roadways that are posted at 30 MPH or higher. None of those roads will be affected by HB 2682.

The ubiquitous use of digital devices by motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians represents the greatest new challenge to traffic safety. Unfortunately, people who would rather text than watch the road are unlikely to be helped by a law that reduces speeds in quiet neighborhoods from slow to slower.

John A. Charles, Jr. is President and CEO of Cascade Policy Institute, Oregon’s free market public policy research organization.