



January 28, 2014

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FROM:  Linea Laird, Chief Engineer
Assistant Secretary of Engineering and Regional Operations
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SUBJECT: **Project Delivery Memo #13-03 – Practical Design Speed Policy**

PURPOSE AND DIRECTION

At the direction of the Secretary of Transportation, WSDOT is instituting new Practical Design reforms, with alterations to design speed selection being one of them. Direction in this memo allows for design speed to equal the posted speed. This is consistent with past FHWA Memoranda on design speed selection.

Background

Designing projects requires consideration of issues that affect all road users. Design speed influences and is a control for a number of roadway design elements that affect the final design dimensions, and ultimately the character of the road environment. The practice of establishing a design speed higher than the posted speed may result in 'over designing' the roadway. A higher design speed leads to larger design elements, including larger radius horizontal curves, longer vertical curves, and in some cases wider lanes and shoulders. Using these higher standards can lead to significantly increased project footprint and right-of-way, resulting in higher costs associated with a wide range of project elements, including pavement, earthwork, walls, drainage, environmental mitigation, and modal integration.

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Current WSDOT Policy

When developing projects under modified design level, and urban managed access projects under full design level, Design Manual guidance indicates that in some cases setting design speed higher than the posted speed is “desirable”.

Direction

WSDOT Design Manual Exhibit 1130-1 and Exhibit 1140-1 are hereby replaced by the following guidance: for all route types and posted speeds, the Desirable Design Speed is not less than the posted speed. Use this new guidance only when you are directed in the *Design Manual* to use these exhibits, as other guidance on design speed remains unchanged.

New policy related to practical design is now in development for the *Design Manual*, including the addition of a more context-based approach to the selection of design speed.

Guidance in the Design Manual that is in conflict with this direction will be revised and published in July 2014.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

Development Division

Revise affected *Design Manual* Chapters for publication in July 2014.

Projects / Regions

This revised design speed policy offers more flexibility to design projects and may be used immediately.

cc: Region Project Development Engineers
Region Planning Managers
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