



March 8, 2023

Senator David A. Clemens
State Capitol
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Chairman Clemens and Members of the Senate Transportation Committee,

While AAA is not philosophically opposed to raising a given speed limit, we have reservations regarding the proposal to increase the limits on interstate highways in North Dakota as proposed in HB 1475. While it is true today's vehicles are safer, it can be argued that those driving them are not. Alcohol and drug impairment, distractions, aggression, and not using seat belts, among others, all contribute to an unacceptable level of death and injury on our roads. In forming your decision on HB 1475, AAA asks you to consider what other measures may be necessary to ensure an increase in speed limit won't result in additional loss of life on our highways. Expediency should not take priority over safety. We ask that you keep in mind:

- Research shows that as speeds go up, so do fatal crashes. A 2016 study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety found that during a 20-year period (1993-2013) each 5 mph increase in the maximum stated speed limit was associated with an 8-percent increase in fatality rates on interstates and freeways and a 4-percent increase on other roads.
- Speed has a major impact on the number of crashes and injury severity. It increases the crash energy exponentially. For example, when impact speed increases from 40 to 60 mph (a 50 percent increase), the energy that needs to be managed increases by 125 percent.
- According to the 2020 North Dakota Crash Summary, speed and/or driving too fast for conditions is a factor in about one-third of fatal crashes in North Dakota each year. As a result, speed is a priority emphasis area in state's Vision Zero Plan and a major consideration in Safe Systems planning.
- A higher speed limit will likely have a disproportionately negative impact on young, inexperienced drivers, a group already overrepresented in speed-related crashes. According to the Governor's Highway Safety Association, between 2015-2019 the proportion of fatal crashes that involved speeding was higher for teenage drivers than for other age groups (43% versus 30%). This goes hand-in-hand with inexperience and not understanding when conditions warrant a slower speed.
- Speeds are already exceeding the capabilities of vehicle headlights. Recent AAA test results found that even with the most advanced headlight systems under ideal weather conditions, the ability to see an object in the roadway at night is reduced by as much as 60 percent when

compared to driving in daylight. On high beam, headlights provide adequate lighting for maximum speeds of 48 to 55 mph.

- Numerous studies of travel speeds have shown that 85th-percentile speeds on rural interstate highways increased when speed limits were raised and then continued increasing. If the speed limit is raised, a new, higher 85th percentile speed will be the result. In North Dakota, the 85th percentile speed on both I-29 and I-94 is about 82 mph, according to the ND Department of Transportation. Without increased, high-visibility enforcement, that speed will increase.

AAA appreciates the fact that increasing the speed limit is a popular idea. While many drivers may favor increasing the speed limits, it is unlikely that any family is willing to sacrifice the life of a family member for the sake of the increase. Only after a thorough review of all factors related to the safety of road users – including consideration of increased enforcement and a primary seat belt requirement -- should a speed limit increase be considered.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gene LaDoucer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Gene LaDoucer
Public Affairs Director

AAA-The Auto Club Group (ACG) is a membership based, non-profit corporation operating in fourteen states and two US Territories. It is one of the largest American Automobile Association (AAA) clubs in the United States with approximately 14 million members. ACG provides travel, insurance, automotive, and financial services to its members. In North Dakota, AAA – The Auto Club Group serves more than 70,000 members and works to represent the interests of members and the traveling public in the state legislature.