

# Setting Speed Limits in Barnstable

Workshop  
Barnstable Town Council

May 14, 2026

James H. Crocker Jr. Hearing Room



Town of Barnstable  
Department of Public Works





# Agenda

- Overview of Laws Governing Speed Limits in Massachusetts
  - Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 90, Section 17C
  - Massachusetts DOT Guidance
- Current Conditions in Barnstable
- Options Available to Town Council

# Laws Governing Speed Limits in Massachusetts

- **Speed limits are set in accordance with State Law**
- **Regulatory Speed Limits (Posted)**
  - Requires detailed Engineering Study and a petition to / approval by MassDOT
  - Generally established based on 85% percentile speed
  - White signs with black lettering
- **Statutory Speed Limits (Unposted)**
  - Advisory signage (yellow signs with black lettering) may be utilized to warn motorists, but are not required



Speed	Location and/or Distance Requirements
50 MPH	On a <b>divided highway</b> outside of a Thickly Settled or Business District for at least $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mile
40 MPH	On an <b>undivided highway</b> outside of a Thickly Settled or Business District for at least $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mile
30 MPH	In a <b>Thickly Settled</b> or <b>Business District</b> for at least $\frac{1}{8}$ of a mile
20 MPH	In a legally established <b>School Zone</b>



- **MGL Chapter 90, Section 1 defines a Thickly Settled Business District as:**
  - "...the territory contiguous to any way which is built up with structures devoted to business, or the territory contiguous to any way where dwelling houses are situated at such distances as will average less than two hundred feet between them for a distance of a quarter of a mile or over."

# Speed Enforcement in Massachusetts

## Enforcement of Regulatory Speed Limits

- Instantaneous radar or laser readings by police may be adequate



## Enforcement of Statutory Speed Limits

- Instantaneous radar or laser readings are not adequate
- To be in violation, the motor vehicle must be shown to have been in excess of these speed limits for a least the entire distance associated with each respective statutory speed limit (i.e., 1/8 mile for thickly settled).



# MGL Chapter 90, Section 17C (2023)

- **Allows municipalities to establish a statutory speed limit of 25 miles per hour in Thickly Settled or Business Districts in any city or town way that is not a State Highway.**
- **Not applicable to Private Roads (1,100 in Barnstable)**
- **Municipality has the option of adopting Section 17C on a town-wide basis or street-by-street**
  - Town-wide allows for installation of regulatory speed limits signs (white background with black letters) at jurisdictional boundaries.
  - Street-by-street would require advisory signage on most applicable streets.
- **Municipality is responsible for:**
  - Modifying their Municipal Traffic Code (as necessary) if they have adopted Section 17C.
  - Notifying MassDOT if Section 17C is adopted.



# Citizens' Proposal

- **Proposal**
  - Adopt lower speed limit on Thickly Settled roadways.
- **Purpose (Desired Outcomes):**
  - Lower vehicle speeds
  - Improve vehicle stopping distances
  - Improve survivability in a crash

# From MassDOT Guidance Documents

## To effectively reduce vehicle speeds:

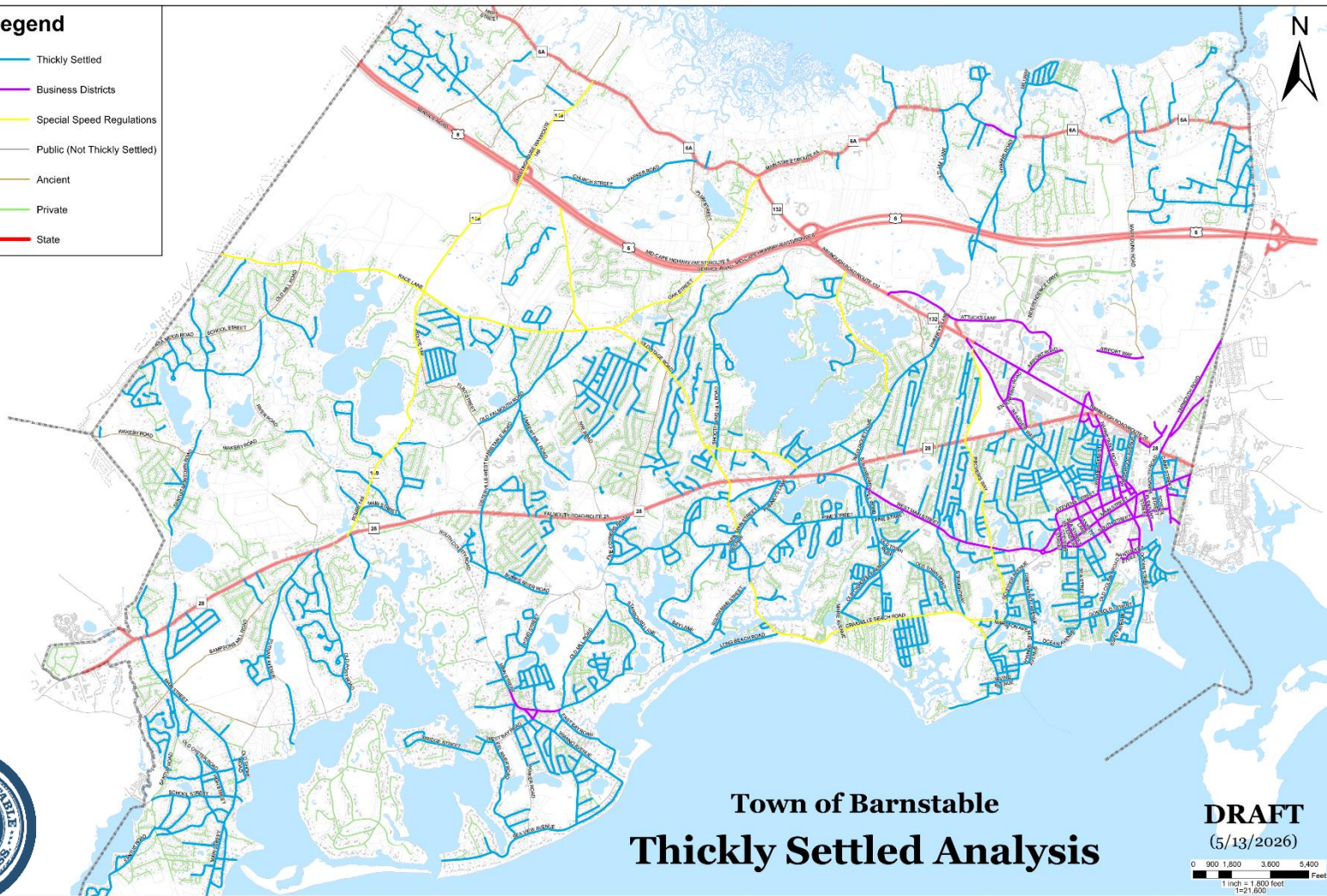
- Setting speed limits is **only as a part of a broader strategy**:
  - Geometric changes to the road
  - Education
  - Enforcement
- Studies have shown that arbitrarily raising or lowering posted speed limits alone will result in a difference of less than 2 mph in mean and 85th percentile speeds.
- 2 mph change is not practically meaningful, and “[does] not have a major effect on driver behavior or encourage most drivers to comply with the posted speed limit.”
- There is no evidence that shows arbitrarily lowering or raising the posted speed limit will have a statistically significant impact on crash reductions.

# Conditions in Barnstable

	Miles	Number of Roads
Total Miles of Public Roads (excluding State Roads)	260	685
Miles of Public Roads with Existing Special Speed Regulations	21	10
Miles of Public Roads identified as thickly settled	190	622
Miles of Public Roads identified as Business Districts	20	47
Total Miles of Private Roads	206	1,077
Total Roads covered by proposal	210 (41%)	669 (38%)

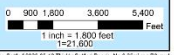
# Legend

- Thickly Settled
- Business Districts
- Special Speed Regulations
- Public (Not Thickly Settled)
- Ancient
- Private
- State



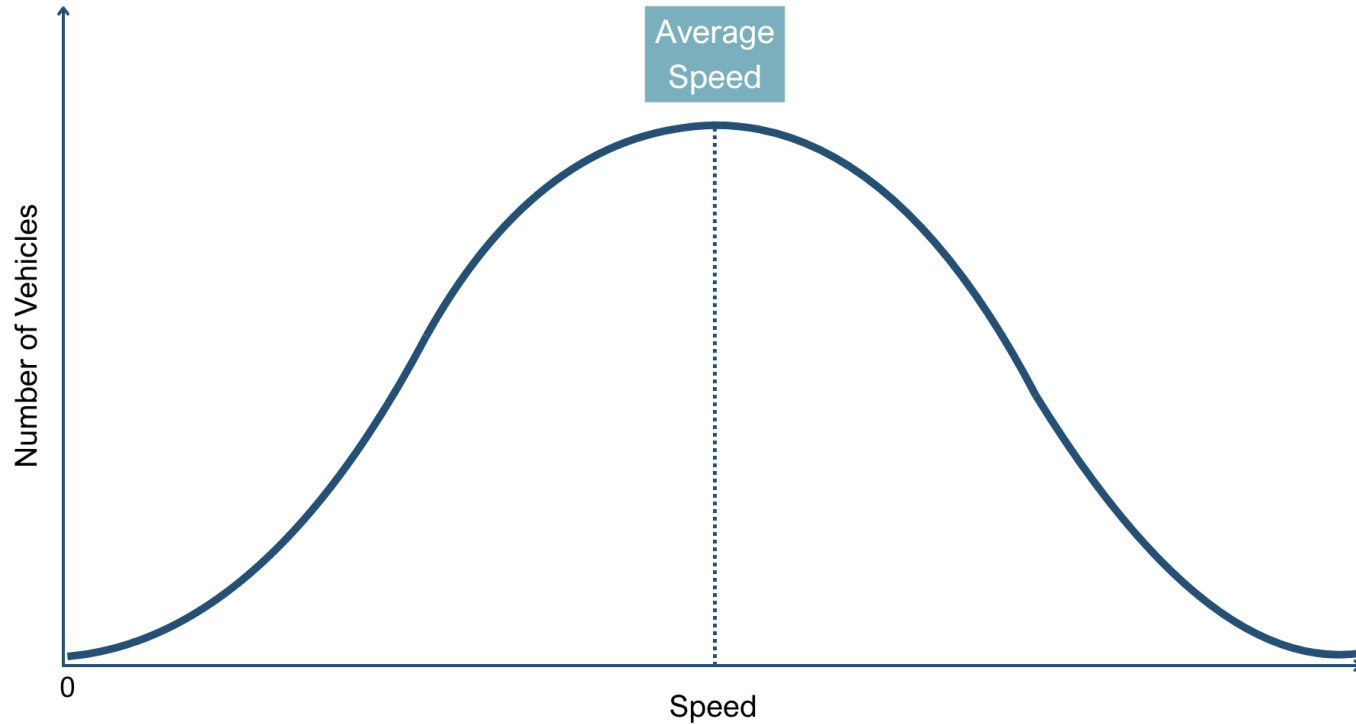
## Town of Barnstable Thickly Settled Analysis

**DRAFT**  
(5/13/2026)

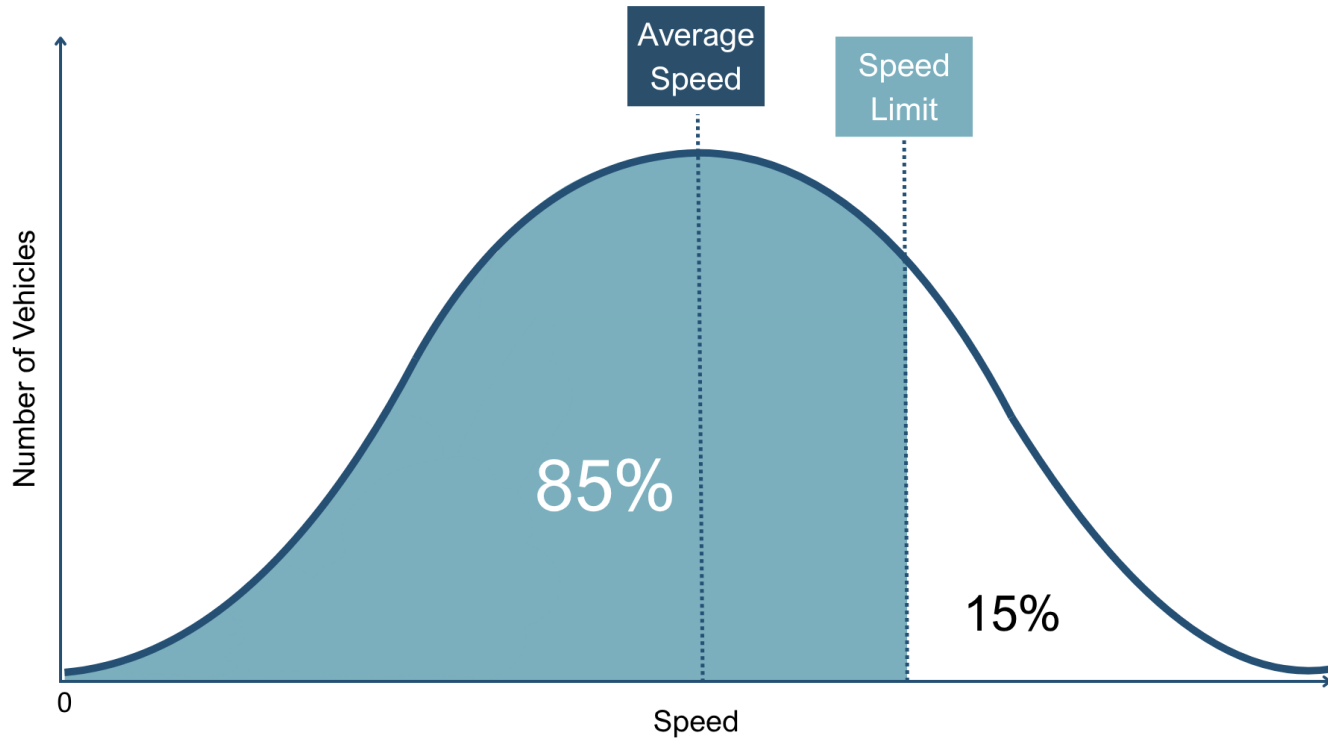


# Speed Studies

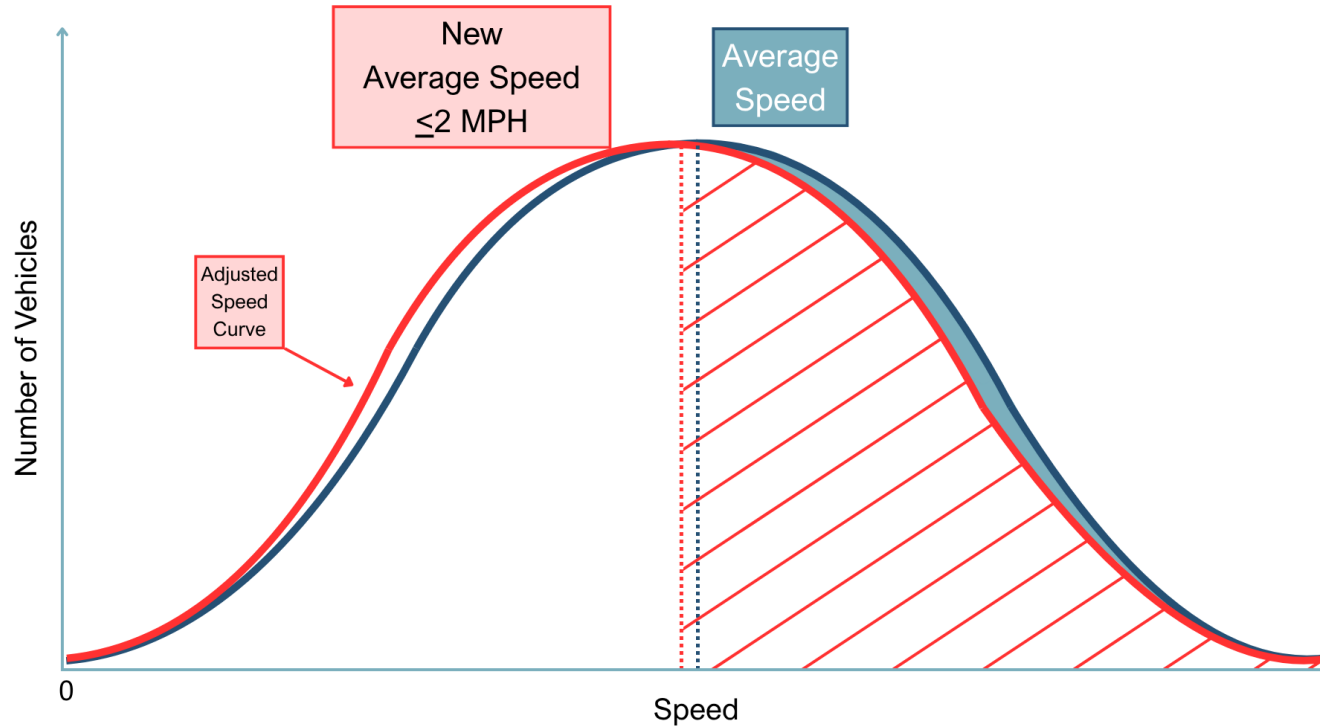
(Speeds are selected by the driver)



# Establishing Speed Limits

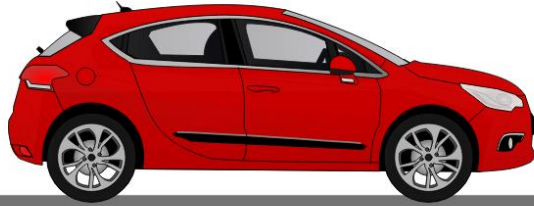


# Effects of Proposed Speed Limit Change

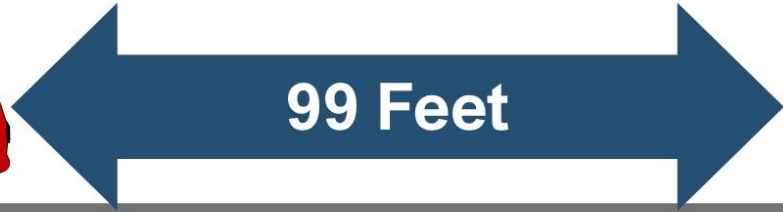


# Vehicle Stopping Distance

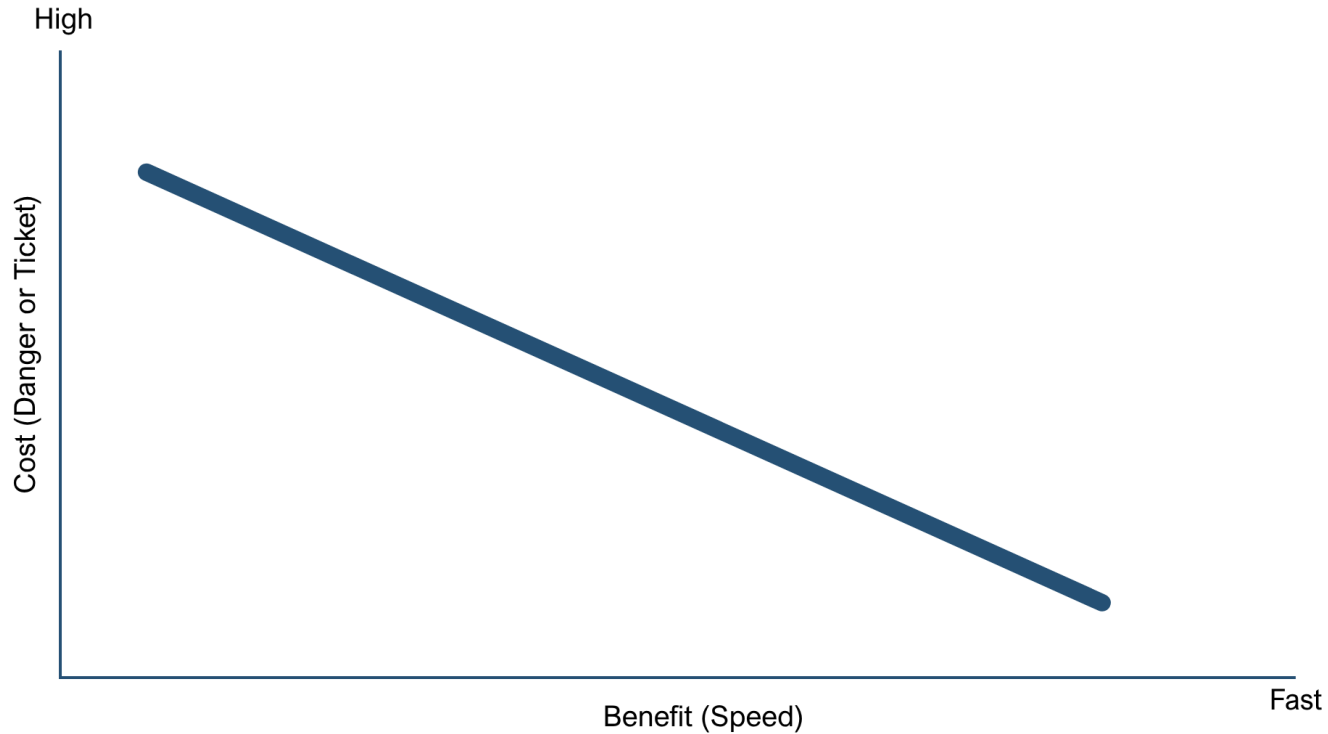
30 mph



28 mph



# Driver Behavior Cost/Benefit Analysis

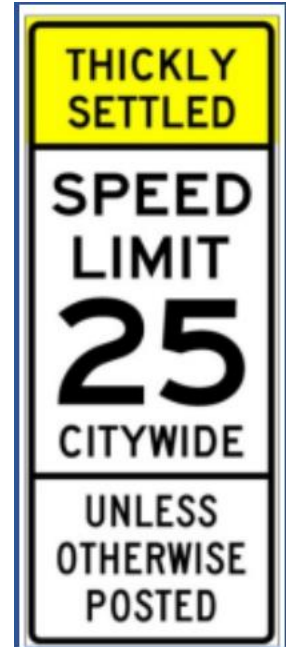


# Option #1: No Change

- **Statutory Speed Limits would remain unchanged and in accordance with MGL Chapter 90, Section 17.**
- **Certain roadways could be further studied and have special speed regulations established.**

# Option #2: Adopt 17C Town-Wide

- **Statutory Speed Limit on all public roads identified as Thickly Settled and Business Districts is reduced from 30 mph to 25 mph.**
- **Requires posting of approved signage at all entry points to the Town.**
  - Existing advisory Thickly Settled, 30 mph signs would need to be switched out or removed.
- **Does not apply to approximately 65% of roads, including:**
  - Private Ways
  - MassDOT Jurisdictional Roads (Route 28, Route 6, Portions of Route 132, Portions of Route 6A)
  - Roads with Special Speed Regulations (some examples: Route 149, Old Stage Road, Craigville Beach Road, etc.)
- **Will require further study on some roadways to establish regulatory speed limits.**
  - Examples: Route 132, Phinneys Lane, West Main Street, etc.



# Option #2: Cost & Time Frames

- **Install New Signs**
  - Total estimated cost = \$6,350
- **Replace Existing Signs**
  - Total estimated cost = \$20,775
- **Total Cost Estimate = \$27,125**
- **Estimate Timeframe = ~3 months**
- **May wish to also consider adopting special speed regulations which will require additional studies**
  - Estimate \$5,000 – \$15,000 per road depending upon the roadway

# Option #3: Adopt 17C Road-by-Road

- **Statutory Speed Limit on selected public roads identified as Thickly Settled and Business Districts is reduced from 30 mph to 25 mph.**
- **Requires posting of advisory thickly settled signage at the beginning of each affected section of roadway. Cannot post signage at Town-line.**
- **Cannot apply to the following roads:**
  - Private Ways
  - MassDOT Jurisdictional Roads (Route 28, Route 6, Portions of Route 132, Portions of Route 6A)
  - Roads with Special Speed Regulations (Some examples include Route 149, Old Stage Road, Craigville Beach Road, etc.)



# Option #3: Cost & Time Frames

- **Conduct study to establish regulatory speed limits on roads**
  - Estimated Cost: \$15,000 per road
  - Estimated Timeframe: 6 - 12-month duration per road
- **Portions of over 600 roadways identified as meeting the parameters of Thickly Settled or Business Districts**
  - Some roads may require more than one sign

# Conclusion

**As proposed, this proposed policy change will not result in the desired outcomes unless additional activities are also included:**

- **Better definition of the problem**
- **Speed studies**
- **Greater enforcement**
- **Road reconfiguration**
- **Education and outreach**



Questions?