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Let?s all ?go with the flow?

EDITORIAL

PERHAPS IT WAS the pandemic, but for some reason we've heard nothing about Ontario's timid proposal to try raising the 100 km/h speed limit on a couple of freeways to 110 km/h, or almost the 70 m.p.h. limit thry all once had.

Our suspicion is that the 10 km/h hike had little or no measurable effect, apart from slightly reducing the number of speeding tickets handed out, with most of the traffic continuing to move at about 120 km/h.

We don't know for a fact but strongly suspect that Ontario's speed laws are unique, at least in Canada. Where else in the world do you find a situation where a five-lane highway (with a centre turning lane) has the same speed limit, 80 km/h, as a dirt road in a rural area, where all roadways have an 80 km/h limit unless they are posted?

The experiment with 110 km/h was announced back in May 2019 and implemented last September. The higher limit applied to Highway 402 between London and Sarnia as well as stretches of the Queen Elizabeth Way and Highway 417 but for some reason not for any portion of the Highway 407 toll road or Highways 400 and 401, the province's first two freeways, despite the fact 400 will soon extend north to Sudbury.

Interestingly, in announcing the test, Jeff Yurek, then Ontario's Transportation minister, said the time had come to review the province's speed limits. However, he has since been replaced as minister by Caroline Mulroney, who may not see any need for what most Ontario drivers see as a long-overdue move.

The last real review of the province's speed laws came back in the 1960s, when John Robarts replaced Leslie Frost as premier. Mr. Frost saw no need ever to depart from a law that saw 50 m.p.h. (80 km/h) as the uniform law in rural areas and 30 m.p.h. (50 km/h) everywhere in urban areas, no matter what the quality of the roadway.

In the Robarts era the speed limits rose to 70 m.p.h. (nearly 120 km/h) on the freeways and 60 m.p.h. (about 100 km/h) on modern two-lane highways.

Those limits remained in place until the Arab oil embargoes of the 1970s, when then premier Bill Davis went the United States one step further, choosing 50 m.p.h. instead of 55 m.p.h. as the general limit, but reducing the freeway limits only to 60 m.p.h. And there they have stayed for nearly half a century, while limits in the U.S. are currently as high as 85 m.p.h. on some Interstate highways and most Canadian provinces have limits of up to 120 km/h on freeways and 100 on ordinary highways.

So now that Ontario's economy is starting to recover from COVID-19 and travel is no longer being discouraged, what should be recommended for drivers facing a continued lack of reform of speed laws that were designed to cope with oil shortages?

As we see it, there is a crying need for a campaign aimed at reducing unsafe passing on two-lane highways.

The theme the current government should adopt and proclaim along such roads is ?Go with the flow!? In other words, plead with the driving public to adopt whatever speed is being followed by the vast majority of drivers, rather than try to pass or stubbornly stick to an unrealistically low speed limit.

Hopefully, the current Conservative government should adopt the ?85 per cent? rule, having speed limits set at the speed not exceeded by 85 per cent of drivers.

Our strong suspicion is that such an approach would result in 120 km/h being chosen as the limit for rural freeways and 100 for rural multi-lane highways such as Highway 10 between Orangeville and Brampton.

Elsewhere in the province, two-lane highways should be posted at either 90 or 100 depending on the rural population density and the remoteless of the roadway in question.

Another badly needed reform would be elimination of local speed limits that have been imposed simply because of pressure from residents who don't like to see traffic moving at highways speeds on what used to be gravel roads.