

Editorial ? Lowest speed limits = costliest insurance

How is it that at the same time in history, Ontario boasts Canada's lowest speed limits and costliest car insurance?

We think we know why such a seemingly incredible situation exists and is likely to remain with us in the absence of governmental intervention.

That the current speed limits in Ontario are unrealistically low is something that hardly needs to be demonstrated.

A couple of extreme examples are the limits at the north end of Highway 410 and on the rural portions of Dufferin Road 16, an unofficial Orangeville bypass.

At one point in the province's history, anyone pulling onto a freeway like Highways 400, 401 and the Queen Elizabeth Way would immediately be greeted with signs showing the speed limit as 70 miles an hour (roughly 115 km/h), the main reason being that was the speed anticipated when such roadways were built.

But drivers entering Highway 410 from Highway 10 find the first kilometre or so posted at 80 km/h ? the same limit that exists on unposted gravel (or dirt) roads in rural Dufferin!

The only message such ridiculous postings provide seems to be that the province wants more revenue from speeding tickets. And the ultimate irony is that the remainder of the most recent extension of 410 is inexplicitly posted at 90 km/h, the limit reaching 100 only as the rush-hour traffic mushrooms to be point where it's often stop-and-go between the Bovaird Drive and Highway 407 interchanges.

Similarly, the entire length of Dufferin 16 is posted at 60 km/h, instead of the 70 km/h found inside Orangeville on Riddell Road, as well as on the Mono-Amaranth Townline north of County 16.

And as for comparisons with other Canadian jurisdictions, let's have a look at the contrast between Ontario and British Columbia, which both happen to have Liberal governments.

Here, successive Transportation Ministers have rejected calls for higher speed limits, usually citing critics who contend they would lead to more fatalities, while knowing the main result would be much less revenue from speeding fines.

But out in B.C., Transportation Minister Todd Stone, having ordered a review of speeds actually driven, has ordered them raised, to a maximum of 120 km/h on most freeways. They already were either 90 or 100 km/h on most of the province's two-lane highways. He also announced plans to test variable speed zones using sensors and radar technology to monitor road conditions on sections of roadways subject to weather-related dangerous driving conditions ? something badly needed on parts of Ontario roads like Highway 400, Airport Road and Dufferin 124.

As for Ontario's record-high car insurance rates, part of the reason is our lack of a public insurance system similar to those in B.C., Manitoba and Saskatchewan, which make it virtually impossible to operate a car without it being insured (here, the insured driver winds up paying for crashes involving uninsured vehicles).

But another reason is the virtually universal non-observance of our politicized speed limits, with most drivers tending to go about 15 km/h above the posted limits to avoid being ticketed.

This sad situation is surely a factor in the need for our special ?racing? law with its seven-day licence suspensions and car impoundments for going more than 50 km/h above the posted limit ? something that's not needed in provinces where most drivers obey their more reasonable speed laws.

Ironically, it means someone doing 110 km/h on a highway posted at 60 km/h is deemed to be stunt-driving when you wouldn't risk getting a ticket at 110 on a similar B.C. road now posted at 100 km/h.