

Editorial ? Time for all to ?Go with the Flow?

With its popularity running well below that of U.S. President Donald Trump, Ontario's Liberal administration might well be looking for some new ideas that most, if not all, residents of the province would like and remember when they go to the polls next June. Accordingly, we would like to offer something that either the Grits or one of the opposition parties might endorse. It's merely a slogan, but one that would have to be accompanied by real actions.

The slogan, designed for both the government and all residents of the province who happen to have valid driver's licences: ?Go with the flow!?

One thing that should be universally acknowledged is that Ontario's system of politicized speed limits has led to a situation where they are universally disrespected.

And how could it possibly be any different when, as all local residents know, the five-lane Highway 10 between Orangeville and Highway 410 has the same speed limit as an unmarked township gravel road, the only difference being that the highway is heavily patrolled and that likely raises millions of dollars annually in speeding tickets.

We do know that the existing disrespect for the speed laws has led to Ontario being the only North American jurisdiction to pass a special law against ?racing? ? driving more than 50 kilometres per hour above the posted speed limit. One need only drive in a state or province that has reasonable speed laws to notice the relative absence of both police speed traps and the so-called stunt driving. Instead, you find nearly all the traffic moving at close to the posted limits whenever weather and road conditions permit.

And that, we maintain, is a situation that Ontario badly needs to copy.

A starting point would be to repeat an experiment conducted half a century ago, when John Robarts was Ontario's premier. It may or may not have been in part because Robarts lived in London, not Toronto, but the fact is that his government decided to abandon a policy insisted upon by his predecessor, Leslie Frost. That policy was to have the same speed limits everywhere in the province ? 50 miles per hour (80 km/h) in rural areas and 30 m.p.h. (50 km/h) on all urban streets. The policy applied even for the Queen Elizabeth Way and portions of Highways 400 and 401, completed in the Frost era.

The first departure from that norm was in Toronto, where the Robarts government let the City raise the speed limit on a few arteries, including Lake Shore Boulevard (to 40 m.p.h.) and University Avenue (to 35).

Later, Ontario Provincial Police were asked to survey actual speeds and report back on those not exceeded by 85 per cent of the traffic. That led to the speed limits being raised in stages, with 70 m.p.h. becoming the limit on the QEW and the 400 series highways and 60 m.p.h. on two-lane highways such as Highways 9 and 10 locally.

However, the Arab oil embargoes of the 1970s led to speed limits being reduced throughout North America, with 55 m.p.h. being adopted in the U.S. as a maximum for even the Interstate highways. In Ontario, the government of Bill Davis opted for an even lower rural limit of 50 m.p.h., which today remains unchanged at 80 km/h.

Everywhere else in North America, the speed laws have been modernized, usually employing the same 85 percentile formula employed in the Robarts era. The most common freeway limits are 70 m.p.h. in the U.S. and 110 km/h in other Canadian provinces. Thus, the best means of achieving success in a ?Go with the flow? motto would be to have the same process employed and the new speed limits.

Who knows how many lives would be saved?