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TRAFFIC: Drivers have year-to prove higher limits are deserved

## Speeders push the limit

BY MIKE ADLER  
Staff Writer

Like children, highway drivers may get something they want — a little extra speed — if they can control themselves and slow down, the Toronto area's Ontario Provincial Police commander said this week.

But to get his recommendation for higher posted limits, Supt. Bill Currie, regional commander for Greater Toronto, said drivers on the 400-series highways must slow down for a whole year.

"If you behave yourselves, you can get some reward," he said from the Aurora OPP headquarters.

"First of all, I need some indication that people are willing to slow down."

Fueling Currie's optimism on driver maturity is the success of recently established OPP calming zones along Hwy. 401 and on Hwy. 400 around Langstaff Road, targeting vehicles going more than 120 kilometres an hour.

The Aurora detachment is presenting results from the zones, where more drivers are now staying under 120 km/h today at Buttonville Airport in Markham.

"Our July results are stunning," Currie said. "Hopefully, they're starting to get the message."

Raising the legal limit on the 401, 400 and 407 would fit a belief among police and engineers that traffic should travel at the same speed.

Accidents happen, they say, when hotheads start slaloming through traffic to get by slow-pokes in the centre lane.

"It's just everybody becoming an obstacle to everybody else on the road,"

said Const. Dave Mitchell of the York Regional Police traffic division.

The 400 is not in Mitchell's jurisdiction, but he's certain the average driver on the road, coming back from the holiday weekend on Monday, was traveling 115 km/h or 120 km/h.

York Region staff recommend following the "85th percentile rule" — posting the speed limit as the one 85 per cent of drivers actually drive — when limits on its arterial roads come up for review, transportation director Dave Aspinwall said Tuesday.

Currie said next summer is the earliest he might submit his recommendations on speeds to Ontario Transportation Minister David Turnbull.

Turnbull's ministry has studied the effects of higher speeds. Vaughan King, Aurora MPP Al Palladini, while he was transport minister in 1996, said he was in favour of looking at increasing the highway limits, perhaps using Hwy. 407 as a test case.

But Derek Deazeley, an aide to Turnbull, said the minister is too new in the portfolio to have an opinion and looking at speeds isn't on his agenda.

The GTA has some of the best engineered highways in the country, and some areas of road could be comfortably driven at 115 km/h, Currie said.

But, he cautioned, with the current state of mind common among highway drivers, he doubts a limit of 120 km/h would work. "They'll drive 140 km/h, I know it."

Currie, however, said the OPP can't enforce the 100 km/h. "I just don't have enough officers to pull everybody over," he said.

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