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## City eyes drop in speed limits

By MICHAEL PLATT, CALGARY SUN

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A better solution would be motion-activated tire spikes, ready to instantly slash the rubber of anyone caught peeling down a residential road.

Until such tire-shredding technology exists, a lower speed limit for Calgary's communities is a decent start — and if it works for Edmonton, it'll likely happen here, too.

Alberta's capital is testing a reduction from 50 km/h to 30 km/h or 40 km/h on residential roads, and Calgary aldermen are watching the experiment with eager eyes, hoping a solution to the city's biggest complaint is at hand.

"This would be a good idea for us to look at," said Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart, head of city council's Transportation Committee.

"The most frequent complaints to my office are from residents concerned about speeding in the community and the safety risks."

The decision to lower speed limits by up to 20 km/h in six Edmonton communities for a half-year trial period comes as that city wrestles with the same problem that's plagued Calgary for years.

Here, motorists tearing down quiet residential roads is the top complaint heard in many aldermanic offices, with people fearing for their safety, and more important, the safety of their children.

If driving licences included a test for maturity, this wouldn't be a problem.

But it is a problem — all over Calgary, there are residential roadways where motorists ignore the limit, whipping past homes and parked cars with little chance of stopping if someone steps into the roadway.

It's scary enough for adult pedestrians — for parents with small children still learning about the dangers of traffic, it's downright terrifying.

The worst part, says Colley-Urquhart, is that often it's people from the same neighbourhood who are the problem.

"What upsets people most is that for the most part the speeders live there," said Colley-Urquhart.

Of course, it's one thing to lower the speed limit, another thing to enforce it.

In Edmonton, the pilot project is being bolstered by a fleet of four mobile photo radar vans, which will patrol residential roads where the limit will be lowered, starting in May.

Unlike traditional photo radar units, the new vans can identify speeders as the police vans themselves are in motion.

Digital signs displaying the speed of motorists will also be used during the six-month test, which is expected to cost Edmonton something like \$600,000 for new signs and the like.

Allan Bolstad, executive director of the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues, said enforcement is part of the plan, but he hopes the publicity and education makes traffic tickets a rarity.

"It's pretty obvious that by the time this starts, people will realize they need to slow down," said Bolstad, a former Edmonton city councillor.

"The message will be out, and every street will have a new speed limit sign."

Enforcement and education are official methods of reducing speed, and together, they might work, especially to deter the really foolish few who race down residential roads. For the rest, human nature is almost certain to reduce the overall speed in neighbourhoods — human nature is all about driving slightly over the legal limit, whatever that may be.

At 50 km/h, many motorists will do 55 or slightly more; at 30 km/h or 40 km/h, most will drive well under 50.

This was demonstrated on one Edmonton road used in the preliminary study. There, the speed limit was reduced to 30 km/h more than 20 years ago: Drivers now average 42 km/h.

The same result occurred in Columbia, Mo., last year, when that city tried reducing its residential limit to 40 km/h. Researchers reported a significant drop in average speed.

Slower cars are cars that can stop more quickly, if and when a child steps into the road.

Throw in a few strategic speed humps on the worst streets, and a lower limit has every chance of solving this city's biggest year-round headache.

Ald. Bob Hawkesworth said he'd be very interested in trying the Edmonton experiment here in Calgary, though he'd want to see the results before supporting a lower limit city-wide. "You have to see that it has a positive impact, but that's why you do a pilot project, to see the response and effect," he said.

"Certainly, I think it's worth a try."

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