



City Council Report

December 16, 2025

Infrastructure Services-2025-0010

Whoop Up Drive Speed Reduction

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Department Infrastructure Services

Summary

As part of the Transportation Safety Plan, the Transportation department has been working on options to implement Safe System design principles and reduce collisions and fatalities. This report provides a technical justification for the operational decision of reducing the posted speed limit on the Whoop Up Drive from Scenic Drive to University Drive from 90 km/h to 70 km/h. This information is presented to Council as information.

The corridor is a six-lane divided expressway with three lanes per direction, narrow shoulders, concrete jersey barriers on both sides, limited roadside clearance, and grades up to 8%. Traffic volumes along the corridor are approximately 50,000 vehicles per day (ADT).

A review of corridor geometry, roadside design features, safety performance principles, and Transportation Association of Canada (TAC) speed-management guidance indicates that the current 90 km/h posted speed is inconsistent with the corridor's geometric constraints and roadside risk environment.

A 70 km/h posted speed more appropriately reflects actual operating conditions, improves safety margins, and aligns with the Safe System approach.

Recommendation(s)

That City Council receives this report as information.

Financial

There is no funding request for this change. All the speed signs and changes will be covered by the existing operating budget.

The change in speed is focused on a Safe System approach and by reducing collisions there is an indirect benefit based on reduction of medical expenses, lost productivity, legal costs, emergency services, insurance administration, congestion, and property damage resulting from collisions. Preventing even a handful of serious crashes could save millions in direct costs while improving overall community safety and quality of life

Background and Prior Decisions

he WUD corridor is a six-lane divided expressway with three lanes per direction, narrow shoulders, concrete jersey barriers on both sides, limited roadside clearance, and grades up to 8%. Traffic volumes along the corridor are approximately 50,000 vehicles per day (ADT).

A review of corridor geometry, roadside design features, safety performance principles, and Transportation Association of Canada (TAC) speed-management guidance indicates that the current 90 km/h posted speed is inconsistent with the corridor's geometric constraints and roadside risk environment.

Research indicates that a one km/h decrease in average speed correlates with a five percent reduction in crashes. The relationship is particularly strong for serious collisions. Studies have found reductions in collisions with injuries ranging from 25% to 35% when speeds were reduced from 80 to 70 km/h on urban arterial roads.

Variable speed signs were installed by the Transportation department as part of operational changes on Whoop-Up Drive in October 2014, making Lethbridge one of the first Canadian municipalities to implement the technology. The signs were introduced to enhance safety by allowing speed limits to be adjusted based on real-time conditions like weather and traffic.

On November 16, 2023, bypass gates were installed on WUD. The bypass gates (used for emergency two-way traffic flow) on Whoop-up Drive in Lethbridge were installed as part of new emergency protocols implemented after a major traffic incident on June 28, 2023.

The updated protocol allows for providing two-way traffic on Whoop-Up Drive if one direction is closed due to an emergency and maximizing one-way movement during a mass evacuation of either side of the city.

On August 6, 2025, a flatbed trailer carrying heavy equipment struck the underside of the Whoop-Up Drive bridge, causing significant damage to four of the six steel girders. The incident led to the closure of traffic lanes, the start of extensive repairs.

Engagement

Infrastructure Services will work with Corporate Communications and the Outreach and Education team to inform the public of the changes.

Lethbridge Police Services (LPS) has been engaged and is supportive of the change and will support the Transportation department in the implementation and enforcement of the speed change.

Lethbridge Fire and Emergency Services (LFES) has also been engaged; Overall there is no impact to the HIRF response times (first unit to respond) but there is some impact to response times from firehalls located on either side of the bridge when responding to a second emergency that require travel across WUD. Infrastructure Services, the GIS team and LFES will work together to amend the plans as required.

Recommendation and Option(s) Analysis

Transportation department recommends reducing the posted speed limit on the Whoop Up Drive from Scenic Drive to University Drive from 90 km/h to 70 km/h effective after the completion of the repairs to the underside of the bridge girders is completed in December 2025.

- Community/Citizen:
 - Social: Research indicates that a one km/h decrease in average speed correlates with a five percent reduction in crashes. Change is implemented to enhance safety and provide residents safe driving conditions.
 - Economic: The change in speed is focused on a Safe System approach and by reducing collisions there is an indirect benefit based on reduction of medical expenses, lost productivity, legal costs, emergency services, insurance administration, congestion, and property damage resulting from collisions. Preventing even a handful of serious crashes could save millions in direct costs while improving overall community safety and quality of life
 - Environment: No impact.
- Risk:
 - Research indicates that a one km/h decrease in average speed correlates with a five percent reduction in crashes
 - Fire response could be impacted, Infrastructure Services and Lethbridge Fire and Emergency Services will be working together to mitigate the impact.
 - Reputational: Potential for negative feedback or public dissatisfaction.
- Implementation and Communication Plan:
 - Infrastructure Services will work with Corporate Communications and the Outreach and Education team to inform the public of the changes
- Changes will be implemented in December 2025

Attachment(s)

1. Whoop-Up Drive Speed Memo Nov 13 2025

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.