

## Oregon is updating curve ‘advisory speed’ signs around the state

*Why are we changing many of the advisory speed signs on curves?*

- **To meet updated federal requirements – which will improve safety.** Updated [federal procedures](#) require consistency of curve advisory speeds on all public roads. Consistency in curve signing means a curve with an advisory speed of 40 mph in the Willamette Valley will feel similar to a 40 mph curve in Baker County or a 40 mph curve in another state.
- **To make speeds more reliable.** New technology allows us to determine advisory speeds for curves with more certainty and consistency; current speeds were determined using a method that has now been digitized.
- **To adjust for advances since curves were last evaluated – in vehicles, road design and pavements.** Newer vehicles can corner with increased speeds while maintaining a comfortable ride. Oregon’s roads have also benefited in the past several decades from improved design and advanced pavements, creating safer, smoother roads. These roads need to be re-evaluated using the new technology, too.

*Why is it important for the public to be aware of these potential changes?*

ODOT’s old way of establishing curve speeds resulted in setting conservative advisory speeds – or lower speeds than a driver could comfortably drive through the curves. As a result:

1. Drivers may be accustomed to taking curves faster than the posted advisory speeds, but that will change when the speeds are adjusted. **It will be critical that drivers pay attention to and heed the new advisory speeds.**
2. In most cases, the posted advisory speed will increase to more realistically reflect the speed that can be driven comfortably through the curve.

Here’s an example: You’re driving a roadway with a 45 mph speed limit. You’re nearing a curve and the old curve advisory speed sign says “20 mph” but you know, because you’ve driven the curve many times and your experience tells you Oregon’s curve advisory signs are conservative, that you can comfortably go faster, usually 10 mph faster, you’ve found. **With the update**, that “20 mph” sign becomes, for example, a “30 mph” sign. **NOW you must pay attention to the sign**, because it’s more accurate – and you can no longer go 10 mph *faster* than the advisory curve sign.

*How many signs will be changing?*

A lot! ODOT commissioned research engineers at Oregon State University in 2011 to study curves and curve advisory speeds on state highways. Based on those findings, we estimate changing between 50 percent and 75 percent of all curve advisory speed signs across the state. Because each corridor is unique and it’s been a while since most signs were installed, we don’t know exactly how many signs will be adjusted or removed; in rare instances, we will install signs where there were none before.

*What are these yellow speed advisory signs anyway?*

According to the Oregon Driver Manual, yellow warning signs alert you to possible hazards or a change in road conditions ahead. As a driver, you are ultimately responsible for recognizing and reacting correctly to changing conditions.

The majority of changes will increase the advised speed by 5 to 10 mph; how many curves will have their advised speed raised by more than 10 mph over the current speed? Preliminary data is giving us an approximate idea by geographic region:

- In ODOT's Region 2 (Willamette Valley, north and central coast), less than 5 percent of curves will have an advisory speed increase greater than 10 mph.
- In ODOT's Region 5 (eastern Oregon), about 14 percent of curves will have an advisory speed increase greater than 10 mph.
  - In some of these locations, there were changes of 25 mph or more; teams are re-evaluating to verify the results.
- Teams are currently traveling the state using the new technology to re-evaluate curves and we'll know more about ODOT's Regions 1, 3 and 4 as they make progress. We estimate similar results – most signs increasing by 5 to 10 mph, with a small number increasing by 10 mph or more.

### *What have other states done?*

Washington, Idaho, Montana, Louisiana, Pennsylvania and others are using the same tool we're using to re-evaluate their systems. All states are required to update curve warning signs to the new standards by the end of 2019. Other states won't be seeing as many 10 to 15 mph changes as Oregon because Oregon's old "comfort" limits were set more conservatively than the limits generally used nationwide.

### *What roads are affected by these changes?*

This change affects interstates, state highways and county roads with average daily volumes above 1,000 vehicles per day. ODOT is re-evaluating 8,000 miles of highways, in both directions.

### *Why is this taking several years to accomplish?*

It is taking time to bring everything up to date, and that's why the federal government is allowing several years for completion. Initially, we were only able to evaluate about 10 curves per day per traffic investigator (just to collect data). With an update in tools and methods, we're now collecting data on about 50 miles per day per traffic investigator. After we collect, analyze and make recommendations on the data, we will need to manufacture and install the signs – throughout the entire state.

