



TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION
FACT SHEETS

“SPEED BUMPS” AND “SPEED HUMPS”
THERE IS A DIFFERENCE

“Some Communities Use ‘[Speed Bumps](#)’, Why Can’t We?”

A speed bump is a bump of asphalt about a foot wide, 3 to 4 inches high, and placed laterally across the traveled portion of the road. The speed bump poses an increased hazard to the unwary, a challenge to the daredevil, a disruption of the movement of emergency vehicles, the cause of an undesirable increase in noise, and a real problem for snow removal.

Because speed bumps have considerable potential for liability suits, Michigan has officially rejected them as a standard traffic control device on public streets.

Tests of various experimental designs have demonstrated the physical inability of a speed bump to successfully control the speeds of all types of vehicles. The purpose of a speed bump is to make the ride over it uncomfortable for drivers, thus encouraging them to reduce their speed. The driver of a soft sprung sedan can experience a more comfortable ride over a speed bump at a low or high speed, because of the vehicles’ suspension system. On the other hand, a vehicle with tighter suspension such as a school bus, fire truck, moving van, semi-truck, etc., must virtually stop before going over a speed bump.

Often these devices are suggested to combat speeding or “cut-through” vehicles. If speeding is the alleged problem, studies must be conducted to determine the extent of the problem. Other, more effective steps can be taken to decrease the speeds of vehicles or number of speeders. Often, there are a few speeders who cause most of the problems. If “through” traffic is the problem, it is often the symptom of a traffic related problem on a nearby major street. The real problem should be determined, analyzed and corrected.

The control of speeding in residential neighborhoods is a widespread concern which requires resident compliance and patience, and persistent law enforcement efforts, not speed bumps.

“Some Communities Use ‘[Speed Humps](#)’, For Traffic Calming, Can We?”

A speed hump is an elongated mound in the roadway pavement surface extending across the travel way at a right angle to the traffic flow. A speed hump is typically 3 inches in height (with applications as high as 4 inches) and 12 feet or more in length along the vehicle travel path. A speed hump that is 20 feet in length and flat in the middle is considered a speed table. The speed hump has been used by many communities as a traffic calming device in an attempt to control travel speeds and minimize cut-through traffic on residential neighborhood streets.

Communities that permit the installation of speed humps often have a “Traffic Calming Program” which is a formal process for residents and property owners to engage the community officials in a partnership to explore traffic concerns, and potential solutions, on local streets. The installation of speed humps is often the last resort when other efforts have not resolved the concerns.

A good resource on the traffic calming practice can be found at the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) ePrimer website: https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/speedmgt/traffic_calm.cfm. The info on Speed Humps, Speed Tables, etc., is under the section “Toolbox of Individual Traffic Calming Measures”.

Traffic Calming ePrimer is a free, online resource openly available for public use. The ePrimer presents a thorough review of current traffic calming practice and contains the information needed to understand this complex field. The ePrimer is presented in eight distinct modules developed to allow the reader to move between each to find the desired information, without a cover-to-cover reading. The ePrimer presents:

- A definition of traffic calming, its purpose, and its relationship to other transportation initiatives (like complete streets and context sensitive solutions).
- Illustrations and photographs of 22 different types of traffic calming measures.
- Considerations for their appropriate application, including effects, design and installation specifics.
- Research on the effects of traffic calming measures on mobility and safety for passenger vehicles, emergency response, public transit, waste collection vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists.
- Examples and case studies of both comprehensive traffic calming programs and neighborhood-specific traffic calming plans.
- Case studies that cover effective processes used to plan and define a local traffic calming program or project and assessments of the effects of individual and series of traffic calming measures.