



TOWN OF BETHANY BEACH

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Dear Mayor Saxton,

I am writing on behalf of the communities of Sea Colony, Middlesex Beach and Bethany Beach, to respectfully request that the Town Council of South Bethany reconsider supporting a request to the Delaware Department of Transportation to lower the speed limit on Delaware Route 1 through our respective communities from 35 mph to 30 mph.

Our communities continue to see unprecedented increases in the number of pedestrians and cyclists on our streets and highways year-round and nowhere are they as unsafe as they are on Delaware Route 1. As we all know, Route 1 is the four-lane open highway where motorists approach our communities from both the north and south at speeds often over 55 mph, and while many drivers slow, few maintain a speed of 35 mph as they drive through our communities.

Exacerbating the safety problem caused by those who do not comply with the posted 35 mph limit, is the challenge pedestrians and cyclists face traversing a median 150 feet wide. Even those using a marked crosswalk or marked crosswalk with a flashing pedestrian warning light are at risk. Complaints and stories of miscues and near misses are increasing as pedestrians and cyclists enter the roadway while approaching cars are not yielding. Risk is always imminent, and heavy traffic and nighttime make the problem even worse.

Lowering the speed limit from 35 mph to 30 mph would have a significant effect on improving pedestrian/cyclist safety.

An often-quoted study conducted by the Foundation for Traffic Safety makes the case that even minor reductions in speed can have significant consequences when we are measuring the impact of a car hitting a person. The study shows the risk for both serious injury and death correlated to the speed a car is traveling when it strikes a pedestrian.

Risk of serious injury:

16 mph 10%

23 mph 25%

31 mph 50%

39 mph 75%

46 mph 90%

Risk of death:
23 mph 10%
32 mph 25%
42 mph 50%
50 mph 75%
58 mph 90%

The National Highway Safety Administration has reported that even a one mph reduction in vehicle speed can result in a 17% decrease in fatal accidents. The most obvious reason is the distance a vehicle will travel before the driver can bring it to a complete stop. The lower the speed, the shorter the distance. As reported by the South Bethany Police Department at your Town Council meeting on November 18, a reduction in speed from 35 to 30 mph would add 27 feet of stopping distance in the event of hard breaking.

Those and other studies and reports support a conclusion that even minor reductions in speed have a significant effect on decreasing both injury and death in accidents.

Decreasing the potential for serious injury and death as our residents and visitors cross very busy intersections that are less than ideal, is the reason we are asking the Town of South Bethany to join us in our request to the Delaware Department of Transportation to lower the speed limit on Delaware Route 1 from 35 mph to 30 mph.

Seasonal or year-round reduction

Whether to lower the speed year-round or just during the busy tourist season from May 1 to October 15 is a separate issue. The Bethany Beach Town Council voted for the speed reduction during the more crowded tourist season and giving drivers more latitude when there aren't as many people trying to cross the highway. Sea Colony and Middlesex also agreed. That still seems to be the preferable choice in balancing the different interests involved.

However, we recognize that there are pros and cons for each alternative. We recognize that changing speed limits back and forth during the year could be confusing for some drivers (and a possible logistical problem for DeDOT in changing the signs). Therefore, if the South Bethany Town Council has reasons to believe that a year-round reduction would be better, then we would be willing to reconsider that option. In any event, DeDOT may make the final decision on this issue for us.

We believe our request to DeDOT has a much better chance for success if we speak as one and I personally hope this is just the beginning of us uniting and working jointly on initiatives that benefit our closely linked communities.

All the best,



Rosemary Hardiman