



Lowering Speed Limits to Keep Nova Scotians Safe:

The opportunity that automated traffic enforcement could bring to Nova Scotia

Summary

In the Spring of 2025, the Provincial government [shared](#) that Automated Speed Enforcement (ASE) technology, like speed cameras, may finally be implementable in 2026. With this new tool in the road safety toolbox, there are opportunities, risks and public opinion to consider.

The Ecology Action Centre commissioned a public opinion study by Narrative Research in May 2025. The results demonstrated that **a majority of Nova Scotians support the use of automated speed enforcement** - 64% of Nova Scotians support fixed speed cameras and 65% support the use of speed-on-green cameras (cameras that capture running red lights and speeding through intersections). In the study, 47% of Nova Scotians reported seeing a vehicle driving over the posted speed limit on their street at least once a day.

ASE is a tool. It provides the opportunity to make broad municipal and province wide speed limit reductions via enforcement. **This is an opportunity to reduce fatalities, collision-based congestion, and the strain on our overburdened healthcare system.**

Therefore, with ASE becoming a potentially implementable tool, the Ecology Action Centre is calling for regulatory changes to **lower residential street speed limits to 30 km/h** in urban and suburban municipalities, with exceptions for certain arterial and collector roads. This position is based on strong evidence showing that lower speeds reduce the risk of injury and death — particularly for vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and cyclists.

- At 50 km/h, the survival rate in a pedestrian collision is less than 20%
- At 30 km/h, the survival rate increases to 90%, according to a 2019 [Journal of Road Safety](#) study
- A 2025 [global literature review](#) affirms these findings, confirming that reduced speed limits significantly increase road safety

[A Low Speed Limits study](#) by the Nova Scotia Department of Public Works (formerly TIR) shows that lowering speed limits alone is not enough to reduce speeding. Drivers often continue to exceed posted limits unless complementary measures are in place. The two main strategies to reduce speeding are:

1. Designing safer streets – interim and long-term approaches — most effective: varying timelines and costs.
2. Enforcing speed limits – large scale applications possible, able to generate revenue.

EAC supports a **“both-and” approach**: safer street design and strong enforcement.

The following report breaks down the results of a 2025 public opinion study, assesses possible risks and offers the EAC’s recommendations for an equitable and fair implementation of automated speed enforcement.

Introduction

The Ecology Action Centre strives to reduce all road users' injuries and deaths on municipal and provincial roads in Nova Scotia - particularly in the case of vulnerable road users who are walking or rolling. The EAC supports lowering speed limits on residential roads to 30 km per hour in all municipalities with the exception of some arteries and collector roads.

Implementing lower speed limits would make Nova Scotia's roads significantly safer. Lower driving speeds increases driver reaction time, increases stop distances and lessens energy impact in a collision. The chance of surviving a collision with a vehicle travelling at 50 km/h is less than 20%. The chance of surviving a collision with a vehicle travelling at 30km/h is 90% according to a [2019 study in the Journal of Road Safety](#). These findings are supported by [numerous studies around the world](#) according to a 2025 literature review.

Unfortunately, simply lowering speed limits doesn't impact driver behaviour. There are two main approaches that make human drivers reduce their speeds:

- Designing safer streets that force drivers to drive slower
- Enforcing speed limits via increased policing or automated speed enforcement

This is not an either-or situation – both are needed to make our streets safer.

Designing safer streets – via [street calming](#), [street dieting](#), etc. – addresses the design issues that allow vehicles to drive above posted speed limits. These interventions can range from quick interim solutions like [tactical urbanism](#) to medium- and long-term design solutions. Depending on the type of intervention, these projects can range in both budget and timelines.



Lowering speed limits doesn't work without enforcement. Automated speed enforcement would be quick to deploy and would generate revenue. However, this doesn't address the chronic underlying issue — flawed road design.

For more on road design and safety check out these articles:

[National Association of City Transportation Officials](#), [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#), [Strong Towns](#)

Why Reducing Speed Matters in Nova Scotia

- Speeding was a factor in 20–25% of fatal collisions nationally and 28–44% in Nova Scotia between 2017 and 2021
- Speeding is increasing as a factor in fatal collisions, while impaired driving is declining
- Collisions cause traffic congestion and significant health care costs

Benefits of Reducing Speed Limits

- Save lives, reduce harm, and enhance quality of life for all Nova Scotians — especially children, seniors, pedestrians, and cyclists
- Reduce congestion caused by collisions
- Reduce health care costs from collisions



What are Automated Speed Enforcement Systems (ASE)?

Automated speed enforcement is the use of technology to enforce speed limits. ASE works by using cameras, radars & sensors to pick up a vehicle speeding. A ticket is then issued to the owner of the vehicle. Red light cameras and photo radar are widely used technologies in other parts of the country, (Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia) and world (USA, UK, France, Sweden, Cyprus, the Netherlands, Belgium, Finland, Poland, Morocco, Croatia, Australia, Argentina, Rwanda, India and many others.) Automated traffic enforcement does not result in demerit points to a driver's license or license suspensions, as the driver of the vehicle cannot be identified.

Nova Scotians Opinion - Narrative Research May 2025 Study

A study conducted in May 2025 by Narrative Research demonstrated overall support for ASE in Nova Scotia. The study included 420 Nova Scotians over 18. Region, gender and age quotas were established, and overall results were weighted to ensure accurate representation of the population's true distribution according to Statistics Canada 2021 census data.

The first question of the study gauged support for four different forms of speed enforcement. Each type of enforcement was described as follows:

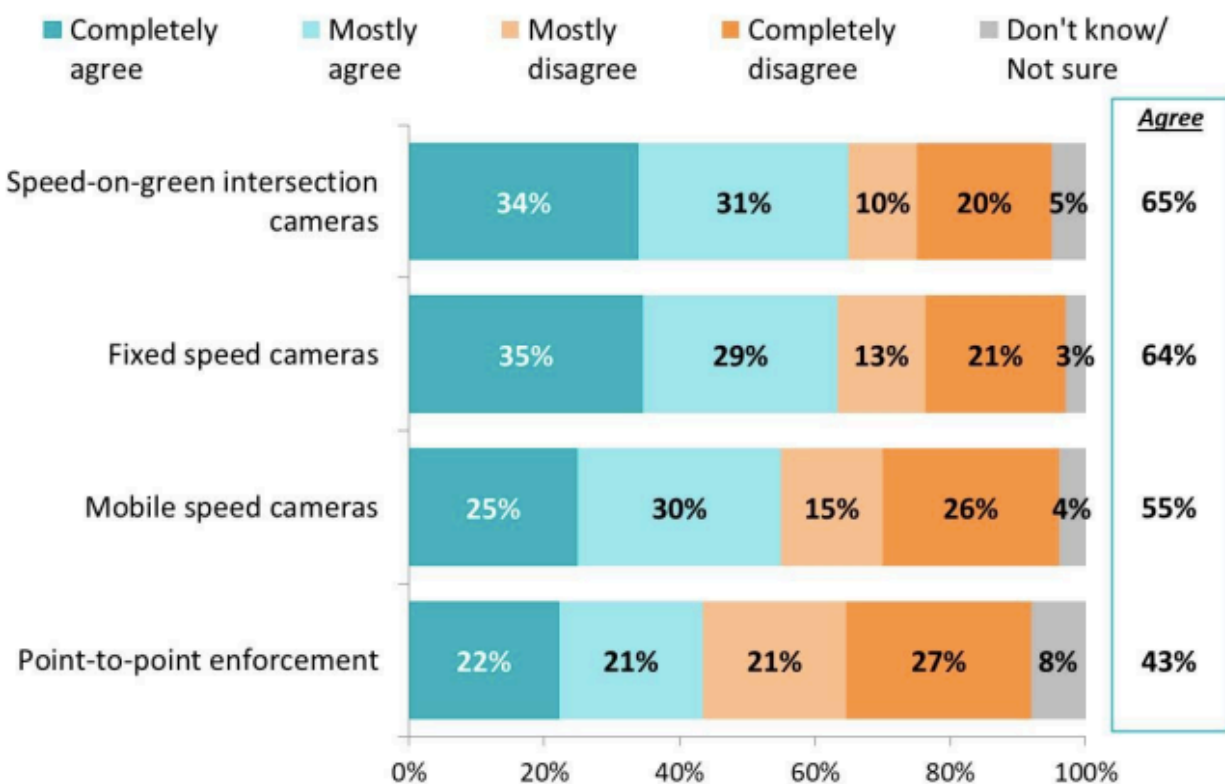
Speed-on-green intersection cameras – Red light cameras that also capture vehicles that are speeding through intersection

Fixed speed cameras – Cameras that stay in one location and measure speed as a vehicle passes; they can be placed in school zones or on other roads

Mobile speed cameras – Cameras that can be moved from place to place; they measure speed as a vehicle passes

Point-to-point enforcement – Uses cameras at two or more distant points on a road. The average speed of vehicles that pass between points is calculated and tickets are issued to vehicles whose average speed over the distance was excessive

Agree/Disagree with Using Speed Enforcement in NS

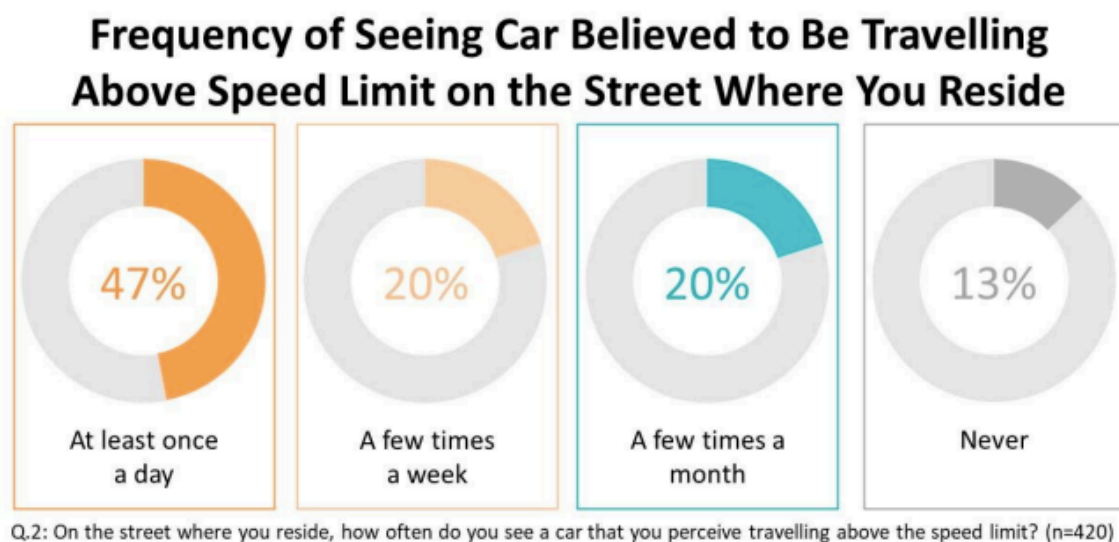


Q.1a-d: To what extent do you agree or disagree with using the following kinds of speed enforcement in Nova Scotia?
(n=420)

Speed-on green and fixed speed cameras were the most supported enforcement options. Regionally, Cape Breton tended to be slightly less and Halifax slightly more in agreement. Men were slightly less supportive than women.

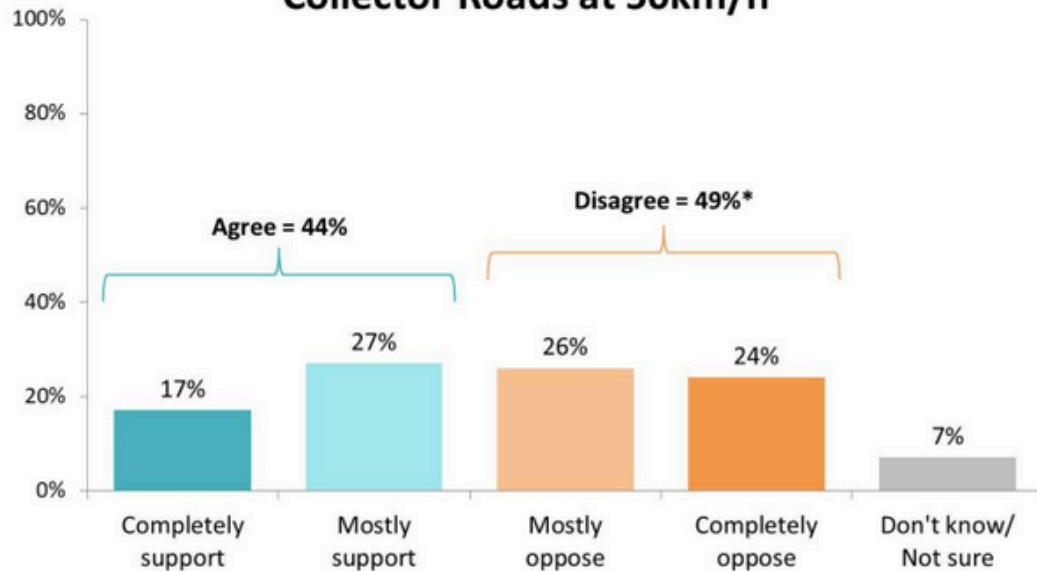
The second question “On the street where you reside, how often do you see a car that you perceive travelling above the speed limit?” established the rate at which Nova Scotians are seeing speeding.

A large majority report seeing a car on the street they reside on to appear to be travelling above the speed limit, with about one-half seeing it on daily basis.



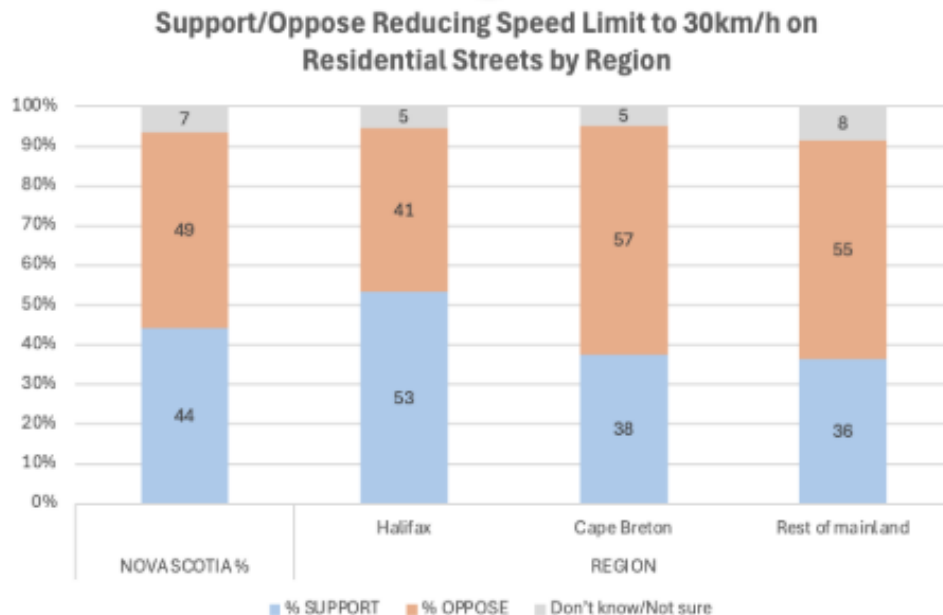
The final question “To what extent would you support or oppose the speed limit reduced to 30km/h on all residential streets in your own municipality, while keeping the speed limit on arterial and collector roads at 50km/h?” presented divided views. The province-wide breakdown is **44% support** and **49% oppose**.

Support/Oppose Reducing Speed Limit to 30km/h on Residential Streets, While Keeping Arterial and Collector Roads at 50km/h



Q.3: To what extent would you support or oppose the speed limit reduced to 30km/h on all residential streets in your own municipality, while keeping the speed limit on arterial and collector roads at 50km/h? (n=420) **Due to rounding.*

However, regionality factors into responses: in **Halifax Regional Municipality 53% support and 41% oppose**, whereas in **Cape Breton 38% support and 57% oppose**.



Lowering speed limits is not a new concept for HRM. The city has explored the option numerous times. Most recently, in 2022, HRM conducted a [Photo Enforcement Feasibility Study Report](#) that covers the initial groundwork for possible implementation.

While support for forms of speed enforcement varies, there is general overall support for the use of automated speed enforcement. Public support for lower speed limits is more mixed but has majority support in HRM.

Concerns Around Photo Radar and Possible Policy Guardrails

As a tool, automated speed enforcement is not without risk. Poorly implemented photo radar can result in: public push back; disproportionate impacts on equity-deserving communities; data security and privacy breaches; misuse of enforcement for revenue and diverting funding away from sustainable road design improvements. Therefore, it's important that implementation of automated speed enforcement is done in tandem with an overall road safety strategy that ensures equity and mitigating regulations for possible risks.

The following are common risk/concerns raised by automated speed enforcement:

Public push back:

ASE can be a polarizing issue. To ensure public support, a communication strategy is needed that will provide transparency about the program's objectives, how it will be implemented, and how its effectiveness will be evaluated.

Warning signs approaching the radars will also help ensure public buy-in. The goal should be to reduce speeds, not generate tickets.

Money grab for the government:

ASE initially leads to steep increases in issued tickets; however, studies show that [within a year, driver behaviour is modified](#), reducing the rate of issued tickets. It is important to be clear that the objective of the program is to reduce speeding, not raise revenue. This could be done by putting a monthly cap on the number of tickets issued or fines issued – ensuring that radars are deployed not to generate revenue but to reduce speeding.

Diversion of funding from other infrastructure:

Setting up and operating ASE is expensive, and there is risk of the province and municipalities diverting funding away from safe road design or active transportation projects to cover photo radar, which generates income.

Strong policy guardrails are needed to ensure that funding for active transportation and safe road design remains in place, and that surplus revenue is directed to additional funds for safe street design and active transportation projects.

Surveillance:

Putting cameras into communities may seem like a simple enforcement tool, but it raises concerns about surveillance and misuse of data.

In places like the U.S., governments are increasingly integrating AI with traffic data, including ASE, sparking fears about monitoring and loss of privacy.

Without clear policy limitations, these systems risk becoming permanent surveillance infrastructure. Strong policies are needed to restrict how images

are used, who can access them, and to prevent expansion beyond traffic enforcement. Guardrails like data retention limits, transparency, and independent oversight are essential to protect civil rights.

This includes regular checks to ensure that data security and privacy are protected.

Equity:

Often ASE systems are disproportionately placed in equity deserving and lower-income neighborhoods, where poor road design has resulted in speeding. This is a worst-case scenario where poor public investment results in ASE which then results in financial punishment for residents.

A strong equity lens needs to be applied to the design and placement of radars. For equity deserving communities the municipality must work with residents to ensure that there is public buy-in to support radar before any installations.

Other equity measures could explore a ticketing scheme that's tied to income, making the impact of a ticket proportionally equal. Finland has had income-based fines for [traffic violations since 1920](#).

It should also be noted that a positive equity aspect of photo radar technology is that it reduces the opportunity for biases to impact tickets and potential unwarranted criminal charges and use of force that can arise from traffic stops. [Studies](#) show that radar issued tickets reflect the demographic of drivers while tickets issued by traditional police stops are overrepresented by people of colour.

Only works where radars are placed:

How and where cameras are placed will impact overall driver behaviour. We require a well-designed system that reduces the overall flow of traffic across municipalities as a whole. This is also why we also need safe street design and complete networks.

This can also be supplemented by other programs like “pace car” where drivers commit to driving within the speed limit thereby reducing the overall speed of traffic flow.

Overall, ASE is a tool. If it is poorly implemented, it can have negative consequences — such as punitive impacts on underserved communities, data security breaches, government misuse and diverting of funding from good road design. However, when properly implemented and paired with lower speed limits it could allow for a province-wide reduction of deaths and injuries caused by speeding – for all road users.



Ecology Action Centre's Recommendations

As the opportunity for implementation of automated speed enforcement approaches, we need provincial and municipal governments to start preparing to ensure that this tool is deployed properly and in a collaborative, holistic manner.

We are requesting the following:

- That the province proclaims the Traffic Safety Act.
 - And amends the Traffic Safety Act - Section 23 (4) to change the speed limit threshold from "less than 50 km per hour" to "less than 30 km per hour."
- That the province supports and funds HRM and other interested municipalities in establishing photoradar programs.
 - HRM already has a [Photo Enforcement Feasibility Study Report](#) from 2022 that covers the initial groundwork for implementation and Cape Breton Regional Municipality has [expressed interest](#) in moving forward.
- That the Province continues funding projects and programs to design safer roads at current levels or more.
 - Revenue generated by ASE can act as additional supplementary funds for infrastructure designed for vulnerable road users.
- That the province utilizes ASE on highways to reduce collisions instead of expensive twinning projects and diverts these funds to transit, active transportation and complete street design projects.
- That the province and municipalities work together to ensure that policies are in place to ensure equitable applications of ASE that work in tandem with road design and other road safety measures.
- That the province implements income-based fines for offences such as traffic violations.

