

Traffic Calming for the City of Bakersfield

We Should All Slow Down

A review of the City of Bakersfield’s use of traffic calming measures in residential zones.



Picture of a speed hump located in a residential area.
Photo from the Caltrans website

SUMMARY:

The City of Bakersfield (City) has many major streets, termed “arterial” and “collectors”, leading directly into residential neighborhood streets defined as “local” streets. (Addendum A) Most often, local streets join a collector or arterial street at a 90-degree angle and are usually not marked with speed limit signs. Under California and City laws, most local streets have a prima facie¹ speed limit of 25 miles per hour. (California Vehicle Code §22352)

Almost all collectors and arterial streets are posted at much higher speeds than residential (local) streets, often double the local street limit of 25mph. This rapid transition from high speed to slow speed can become problematic as drivers may continue well over the 25mph limit after entering the local street. Further increasing concerns are that many local streets are laid out in straight lines for several blocks, which also encourages continued higher speeds.

The State of California has long-established laws and codes, while allowing incorporated cities latitude in traffic planning, also places great emphasis on efficient and environmentally friendly transportation. The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), passed in 1970, codified the State’s intent to implement environmental review and public disclosure whenever cities address traffic issues. Further, California State law included Traffic Impact Analysis as integral to CEQA, particularly directed at limiting Vehicle Miles Traveled².

¹ California prima facie speeds are default speed limits applied when no other speed limit signs are present. Typically, 25mph in residential areas.

² www.lci.ca.gov/ceqa

PURPOSE OF INQUIRY:

California Penal Code §925, authorizes the Grand Jury to conduct inquiries and investigations into the operations, accounts, and records of County and City departments.

The City of Bakersfield Public Works Department (Public Works) Engineers and Staff are charged with ensuring compliance with all State laws and regulations governing traffic engineering within City limits. With the City's population and geographic growth, traffic volume has increased substantially, and some former local streets have become arterials or collectors. Streets such as Gosford, Columbus, Coffee, and many others have changed from two-lane, low-traffic streets to 6-lane arterials within a few years. These changes have presented challenges to Public Works as it attempts to balance rapid growth, budget constraints, and political pressures. In response, several measures are being implemented. These are defined as "traffic calming," and seek to reduce traffic accidents, pedestrian injuries, and deaths. The 2025-2026 Kern County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) reviewed the Public Works Traffic Engineering Support Division (Division) efforts to apply traffic calming, particularly in residential areas.

METHODOLOGY:

The Grand Jury reviewed current literature, including California State laws, the City's General Plan, and the proposed 2045 General Plan. Also reviewed were several overlapping locally generated plans addressing traffic engineering:

1. The Local Road Safety Plan (LRSP), a data-rich document, reviews traffic accidents and incorporates guidelines from the federal Highway Safety Improvement Program.
2. The City's Active Traffic Plan.
3. The Bakersfield Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program (NTCP)³.
4. Further information was obtained by reviewing the Public Works Subdivision and Engineering Design Manual, particularly sections Division 5 and 6⁴.

The LRSP and NTCP are city-wide plans focusing primarily on arterial and collector streets. There is little mention of traffic calming procedures or reviews for residential streets⁵.

In-person interviews were also conducted with personnel at Public Works and the Traffic Division of the Bakersfield Police Department (BPD).

DISCUSSION OF FACTS:

The City of Bakersfield's Public Works Department is wholly responsible for all aspects of city planning, including traffic. Public Works includes Engineering, Traffic, and other divisions.

The City has grown substantially, almost doubling in population from 245,545 in 2000 to over 420,530 in 2025 (an increase of over 71%). The City's land area has increased by over 7%, going from approximately 141 square miles in the year 2000 to approximately 151 square miles.

³ <https://content.civicplus.com/api/assets/e18cc532-3711-4fd6-81d8-74f1fb10df67>

⁴ www.bakersfieldcity.us/943/Subdivision-Engineering-Design-Manual

⁵ www.kerncog.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/LRSP_Bakersfield_202206.pdf

In the year 2000, the City's Traffic Engineering Support Division had approximately five Engineers. Twenty-six years later, the level of engineering staff remains the same. The City was able to add three more Traffic Signal Technicians. These Signal Techs repair and install traffic signals and do not participate in any planning/engineering activities.

The City relies heavily upon citizen complaints before conducting a review of residential traffic flow. Additional input on traffic concerns may be gained from accident reports, particularly when several incidents have been reported in a given area (as noted in the LRSP). The BPD does track accident rates, but there is no routine conference or review held between the Police Department and Public Works staff to discuss traffic concerns.

Citizens complaining about speeding or excessive traffic are usually first directed to contact the BPD using the email link found on their website.⁶ The BPD reviews the submission and, if deemed appropriate, traffic enforcement officers may be dispatched to monitor the area. While present, these officers can be an effective deterrent to speeding infractions, however, this deterrence can rapidly disappear once officers leave the area.

The City has an online portal for traffic signage and street maintenance, such as potholes⁷. There is not a way for citizens to file a complaint online about excessive traffic and/or speeding. There is a form located at the end of the final Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program (NTCP) report. This form was not found anywhere else online. Since it is attached to the NTCP, it must be printed out or saved to a computer and then delivered to Public Works, or by calling directly at 661-326-3724. (Addendum B)

Following a complaint, residents are directed to circulate a petition within their neighborhood and gain enough signatures to prompt a full Public Works review. The petition circulated by individuals residing in the area must be signed by more than 50% of the households affected. It is not clear how the City determines which households would be affected in a given area. The Division reviews submitted petitions to determine whether they have enough verified signatures, and which traffic calming tools might be used.

Once a petition is determined to have merit, multiple methods can be employed to address the issue. Traffic flow surveys are completed, including reviews of speed limits, signage, street conditions and layout.

Several traffic calming measures exist, one of which, bike lanes, is already being implemented by Public Works on both arterial and collector streets. As bike lanes have already been reported upon by the 2024-2025 Grand Jury, this report will not address their use other than to note these lanes are specific to arterial and collector streets and, in most cases, are not relevant to local streets.

Recently, Public Works has begun using speed humps to slow traffic in residential and school zones. Speed humps differ from speed bumps found in many parking lots. Humps are designed to be a more gradual transition, intended to reduce speed to around 10-15 mph without the abrupt, sudden jarring that a speed bump designed to reduce speed to 5-10 mph provides. Speed humps are preferred over speed bumps (Figures 1 and 2) for residential streets:

⁶ www.bpdtraffic@bakersfieldpd.us

⁷ www.bakersfieldcity.us/

1. The City relies upon police services to address most speeding concerns.
2. The BPD can monitor traffic speeds for a period of time, but their presence is not permanent.
3. Most BPD traffic patrols focus upon arterial or collector streets.
4. The BPD's traffic enforcement may not have a long-term influence on driver behavior.
5. The Public Works staff report that a monthly list of speeding complaints is sent to BPD; there is no regular meeting between the Division and the Police Department to proactively address speeding in residential areas.
6. The Division relies upon citizen complaints to initiate many residential traffic reviews, and then requires residents to do the legwork in circulating a petition.
7. The City does promote an online complaint/suggestion form; however, it does not have a place to submit a traffic complaint or request for a traffic calming review.
8. Speed humps significantly slow traffic. Their placement must be carefully designed to ensure that it is appropriate and safe.
9. Some research has suggested emergency responders, such as fire, have expressed concerns that speed humps may slow their response and possibly damage their equipment.
10. The Public Works does not have a process to routinely review traffic patterns across the City.
11. The City does not have a formal agreement with local higher education institutions, such as California State University, Bakersfield to place interns into Public Works.
12. Staff shortage at Public Works makes it reactive rather than proactive to citizen concerns.

FINDINGS:

The 2025-2026 Kern County Grand Jury finds:

- F1. The City does not have a process to routinely review traffic patterns across the City, which can lead to citizens' complaints about congestion and speeding.
- F2. For over 26 years, Public Works has not increased Traffic Engineering staff levels. This can cause numerous long-term problems, including long waits for new project approvals, reliance upon less-skilled positions to take up the slack, and an inability to proactively respond before citizens complain.
- F3. The City may be losing trained engineers and staff to other regions and companies due to higher pay scales and/or lower workloads.

- F4. The Public Works Department and BPD do not routinely meet to assess traffic concerns. This may cause conflicts of interest between the departments concerning speed enforcement, and congestion control.
- F5. The many City Plans (General Plan and various Local Traffic Plans) created over the last two decades are sometimes conflicting, redundant, or no longer relevant. There is not a single website where all relevant plans can be found.
- F6. The City's website does not have a clear online pathway for citizens to file complaints about traffic-specific concerns, including reports of excessive speeding; thus, there is a reliance upon BPD traffic enforcement rather than reviewing engineering issues.
- F7. The Public Works staff are dedicated employees, as demonstrated by their hard work to remain up to date regarding traffic engineering and regulations.
- F8. The Public Works Department and the Traffic Division do not regularly schedule reviews of city codes regarding street transitions to collectors and/or arterials. Regularly scheduled reviews could ensure the latest traffic calming tools are applied to local streets and all new development.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The 2025-2026 Kern County Grand Jury recommends:

- R1. By July 1, 2026, the City should implement a routine review of traffic patterns for all streets. This should occur every two years and may be able to utilize interns to take some of the workload off regular staff. (Finding F1, F3, F8)
- R2. By July 1, 2026, the City should review staffing levels and workloads within the Public Works Department to address the increase in traffic, land area, and ever-changing State regulations. (Finding F2, F3)
- R3. The City should conduct a pay equity study for the Public Works Department, including workload requirements, to be implemented no later than July 1, 2026. This study should be completed and published on the City's website by November 1, 2026. (Finding F2, F3)
- R4. By August 1, 2026, the City should work with the Engineering Department at California State University, Bakersfield to bring interns into Public Works. This could help the City reduce workloads and identify potential new employees before losing them to other job markets. (Finding F2, F3)
- R5. By July 1, 2026, Public Works and BPD should set up formal annual or biannual meetings between representatives of each department to review and address traffic concerns. (Finding F4)

R6. The City Council should conduct a full review of all current City traffic plans to be completed by September 1, 2026. These plans should be incorporated into the General Plan, and compiled into easily accessible and consistent formats. (Finding F5, F8)

R7. By July 1, 2026, the City should include forms in its app, allowing citizens to easily submit concerns about speeding or other traffic issues. (Finding F6)

COMMENTS:

The 2025-2026 Kern County Grand Jury thanks the City of Bakersfield staff who took the time to explain current traffic rules and regulations. It is also appreciated they were open about their opinions and offered valuable suggestions to help the people of Bakersfield.

NOTES:

- The City of Bakersfield and the City of Bakersfield Public Works Department should post a copy of this report where it will be available for public review.
- Persons wishing to receive an email notification of newly released reports may sign up at: www.kerncounty.com/grandjury
- Present and past Kern County Grand Jury Final Reports and Responses can be accessed on the Kern County Grand Jury website: www.kerncounty.com/grandjury

RESPONSE DEADLINE:

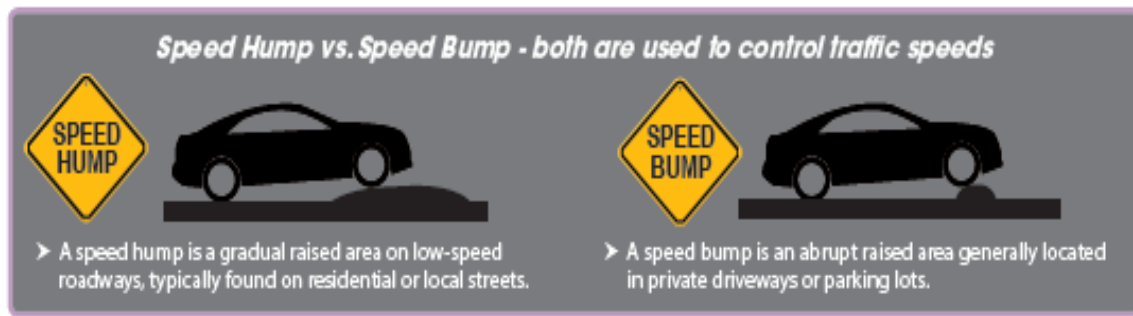
- **REQUIRED WITHIN 90 DAYS FROM:**
City of Bakersfield City Council
City of Bakersfield Public Works Department
- **REQUESTED WITHIN 90 DAYS FROM:**
City of Bakersfield Police Department

RESPONSES ARE REQUIRED PURSUANT TO PENAL CODE §§933(c) AND 933.05:

- **PRESIDING JUDGE**
SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF KERN
1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, SUITE 212
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301
- **FOREMAN**
KERN COUNTY GRAND JURY
1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, SUITE 600
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Cal. Penal Code §929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.

FIGURE 1



Drawing displaying the difference between a speed hump and a speed bump
<https://highways.dot.gov/safety/speed-management/speed-management-countermeasures-more-just-speed-humps>

FIGURE 2



Photo of City of Bakersfield street crew installing a new traffic calming hump
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/23c4e43cdfdb424fb89be0d9c786ba9a>

ADDENDUM A

Arterial Streets

1. **Major (Principal) Arterial:** The major arterial (referred to as a principal arterial by AASHTO) serves the major center of activities of urbanized areas, the highest traffic volume corridors, the longest trip, and carries a high proportion of a total urban travel on a minimum of mileage. The system should be integrated both internally and between major rural connections.

The major arterial system carries most of the trips entering and leaving the area as well as most of the through movements bypassing the central city. In addition, significant intra-area travel such as between central business districts and outlining residential areas, between major inner-city communities, and between major suburban centers, is served by major arterials. Frequently, the major arterial carries important intra-urban as well as inter-city bus routes. Finally, in urbanized areas, this system provides continuity for all rural arterials that intercept the urban boundary.

Access to private property from the major arterial is specifically limited in order to provide maximum capacity and through movement mobility. Although, no firm spacing rule applies in all or even in most circumstances, the spacing between major arterials may vary from less than 1 mile in highly developed central areas to 5 miles or more in developed urban fringes.

2. **Minor Arterial:** The minor arterial inter-connects with and augments the major arterial system. It accommodates trips of moderate length at a somewhat lower level of travel mobility than major arterials. This system places more emphasis on land access but still has specific limits on access points. A minor arterial may carry local bus routes and provide intra-community continuity but ideally does not penetrate identifiable neighborhoods. This system includes urban connections to rural collector roads where such connections have not been classified as urban major arterials.

The spacing of minor arterials may vary from 1/8 to 1/2 mile in highly developed areas to 2 to 3 miles in suburban fringes but is not normally more than 1 mile in fully developed areas.

Collector Streets

The collector street system provides both land access and traffic circulation within residential neighborhoods and commercial and industrial areas. It differs from the arterial system in that facilities on the collector system may penetrate residential neighborhoods, distributing trips from the arterials through the area to their ultimate destinations. Conversely, the collector street also collects traffic from local streets in residential neighborhoods and channels it into the arterial system. In the central business district, and in other areas of similar development and traffic density, the collector system may include the entire street grid.

1. **Major Collector:** This type of street provides for movement of traffic between arterial routes and minor collectors and may collect traffic, at moderately lower speeds, from local streets and residential and commercial areas. A major collector has control of access to abutting properties with a majority of access at local street connections. Normally, a slightly higher emphasis is placed on through movements than direct land access.
2. **Minor Collector:** This type of street provides movement of traffic between major collector routes and residential and commercial local streets as well as providing access to abutting property at moderate low speeds. Consideration for through movements and direct land access is normally equal.

Local Streets

Local streets allow direct access to abutting land and connections to the higher order street systems.

They offer the lowest level of mobility and deliberately discourage major through traffic movements.

Definitions provided by Iowa Statewide Urban Design and Specifications Manual
(https://www.iowasudas.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2025/12/SUDAS_Design_2026_Edition.pdf)

ADDENDUM B

TRAFFIC CALMING REQUEST FORM FROM NTCP

**CITY OF BAKERSFIELD
PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT**

**NEIGHBORHOOD TRAFFIC CALMING PROGRAM
REQUEST FORM**

THE PURPOSE OF THIS FORM IS TO ENABLE RESIDENTS, BUSINESS OWNERS, AND STAKEHOLDERS WITHIN THE CITY OF BAKERSFIELD TO REQUEST AN EVALUATION OF POTENTIAL TRAFFIC CALMING SOLUTIONS FOR A PROBLEM LOCATION OR LOCATIONS WITHIN THE CITY. BY DOING SO, THE APPLICANT IS INITIATING THE FIRST PHASE OF THE CITY'S NEIGHBORHOOD TRAFFIC CALMING PROGRAM OR NTCP. THIS FORM MUST BE FILLED OUT COMPLETELY, INCLUDING APPLICANT INFORMATION,

A DESCRIPTION OF THE ISSUE(S) AT HAND, THE LOCATION(S) OF CONCERN, ANY DESIRED SOLUTIONS (IF KNOWN), AND THE SIGNATURES AND CONTACT INFORMATION OF ANY ADDITIONAL AFFECTED PARTIES WHO SUPPORT THE REQUEST.

APPLICANT NAME: _____ DATE OF

SUBMISSION: _____

APPLICANT EMAIL/PHONE:

APPLICANT ADDRESS:

PLEASE DESCRIBE THE TRAFFIC AND/OR SAFETY ISSUE(S) OF CONCERN:

PLEASE IDENTIFY THE LOCATION(S) OF CONCERN INCLUDING STREET NAME(S), NEAREST INTERSECTION, AND THE EXTENT

OF THE IMPACTED AREA. YOU MAY INCLUDE A MAP OR SKETCH WITH YOUR SUBMITTAL IF DESIRED.

IF KNOWN, PLEASE INDICATE THE DESIRED SOLUTION OR OUTCOME YOU WISH TO OBTAIN FROM THE NTCP.

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**CITY OF BAKERSFIELD
PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT**

PLEASE PROVIDE THE NAMES, SIGNATURES, ADDRESSES, AND CONTACT INFORMATION OF ANY ADDITIONAL RESIDENTS, PROPERTY OWNERS, BUSINESS OWNERS, OR OTHER STAKEHOLDERS WITHIN THE AFFECTED AREA THAT WOULD LIKE TO

DEMONSTRATE SUPPORT FOR THIS REQUEST.

NAME SIGNATURE ADDRESS EMAIL PHONE

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

5) _____

- 6) _____

- 7) _____

- 8) _____

- 9) _____

- 10) _____

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

UPON COMPLETION, THIS FORM CAN BE SUBMITTED ELECTRONICALLY VIA THE CITY'S NTCP WEBSITE OR PRINTED AND

**SUBMITTED BY MAIL OR IN-PERSON TO:
BAKERSFIELD PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT
1600 TRUXTUN AVENUE
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93306**

**FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS FORM, PLEASE CONTACT
BAKERSFIELD PUBLIC WORKS BY EMAIL AT
PWADM@BAKERSFIELD.CITY.US OR BY PHONE AT (661) 326-3724**

STANDARD PLANS

STATE OF CALIFORNIA
CALIFORNIA STATE TRANSPORTATION AGENCY
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

2025 Edition

PUBLISHED BY
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION



Screenshot of 2025 Caltrans Plan Manual. Manual includes all requirements for general street construction and drainage.
dot.ca.gov/-/media/dot-media/programs/design/documents/2025-standard-plans-locked.pdf