

**ROADS**

Scope of 120km/h limit 'to be selective'

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The maximum 120km/hour speed limit policy, a brainchild of new Transport Minister Saksayam Chidchob, will be applied to selected four-traffic lane roads, and to personal vehicles only.

"The new maximum speed limit will not lead to more road accidents. Most of the accidents on our roads come from drunk and reckless driving. Even so, we will have to apply additional safety rules along with the new speed limit," Mr Saksayam told the media yesterday.

He stressed that public buses and trucks still need to comply with the same old 80km/hour speed limit. Furthermore, the 120km/hour speed limit will be applied only to certain partial lanes — those on the far right — while left lanes will be reserved for vehicle travelling at lower speeds. The minister said he has ordered officials to survey four-lane roads nationwide to find potential routes, and prepare safety road infrastructure such as rumble strips, optical speed bars and appropriate pocket lanes for U-turns.

The Department of Highways (DoH) is studying which roads would be suited to the 120km/hour speed limit, according to Anond Luengboriboon, the department's chief. The study will take one month to complete. An initial study found applicable routes such as Rama II Road, Bang Na-Trat Road as well as Bang Pa-in-Nakhon Sawan, and

Bang Pa-in-Nakhon Ratchasima roads. These roads have an adjacent frontage lane and flyover-U-turn.

Meanwhile, the Thailand Accident Research Centre at the Asian Institute of Technology yesterday submitted a letter to the Ministry of Transport, urging the minister to reconsider introducing the new speed limit.

The 120km/hour speed limit, according to the letter, will only lead to more accidents because road design in Thailand and related road infrastructure have been made to support 90-110km/h velocities. It also stressed that highways are full of risk, with entrances, exits, and U-turns everywhere.

Another concern is that road safety infrastructure such as guard rails are not designed to deal with accidents involving vehicles going at such speeds. "The ministry will need to spend a lot of money to replace safety rail guards across the country," said the letter. However, the centre advised the minister to implement the 120km/h speed limit on highways that have fewer entrances, exits, and U-turn points.

Meanwhile, Anuchar Sethasathein, of Road Safety Thailand — a state fund to improve road safety — said the policy on helmet wearing has made little progress. The government in 2011 launched a policy to make all motorcycle riders wear helmets. However, the rate of helmet wearing among motorcycle riders in Thailand is less than 50%, according to a survey.