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Texas lawmakers consider 85 mph speed limit

By [Larry Copeland](#), USA TODAY

Motorists in [Texas](#) and [Kansas](#) soon may be able to drive faster than ever — legally.

By K.M. Cannon, AP

The Kansas Legislature on April 1 raised the limit to 75 on more than 1,000 miles of roads. The measure awaits Republican Gov. Sam Brownback's signature.

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In Texas, which already has some of the nation's highest speed limits, the state House last week passed a bill allowing a speed limit of 85 mph on some highways. A similar bill is being considered in the Senate.

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• **DRIVE ON: ROCK STAR SHOULD BE PLEASED WITH HIGHER LIMIT**

Highway safety advocates are not speeding to embrace higher limits. "It shows we continue to, as a society, want to go faster," says Adrian Lund, president of the [Insurance Institute for Highway Safety](#). "We're willing to raise the speed limit even though we know that if people travel faster we're going to have more deaths on highways."

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He cites decreases in road deaths when the national speed limit was set at 55 in 1973 and increases when it was raised to 65 on some rural interstates in the late 1980s and again when it was abolished altogether in the mid-1990s.

Texas has more than 500 miles of highway with a speed limit of 80. "If we have the ability and the budgetary resources to build new roads, that (85-mph limit) could be the case," says state Sen. Glenn Hegar, a Republican who introduced the Senate version.

Opponents say that if the speed limit is set at 85, most motorists will actually drive 90 or 95 mph. In 2006, the state raised the speed limit from 70 or 75 mph to 80 mph on two highways in West Texas. A 2008 study by the Texas Transportation Institute, a research arm of Texas A&M University, found that in the 16 months after the increase, average speeds increased by 9 mph on one highway and by 4 mph on the other.

"If the speed limit is increased to 85 on certain roads in Texas, we will see a dramatic increase in the number of people that are severely injured or become fatalities," says Jerry Johns, president of the Austin-based Southwestern Insurance Information Service, an insurance trade association covering Texas and Oklahoma.

Kansas Rep. Marvin Kleebe, a Republican who pushed the legislation, says Kansas is the only one of 14 central or western states that has no 75- or 80-mph limit. He says tourists and freighters avoid the state to make better time.

"Of the 14 states that have done it, none have reversed themselves," he says. "So it's not an issue of safety concerns."

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