



# County of Santa Cruz

## BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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FIFTH DISTRICT

April 23, 2024

Ms. Kristin Brown, Chair  
Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission  
1101 Pacific Avenue, Suite 250  
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Dear Chair Brown and Members of the Commission:

The purpose of this letter is to support the Commission staff recommendation to ask Caltrans District 5 to reduce speed limits on Highway 9 within the San Lorenzo Valley town center corridors, Felton, Ben Lomond, Brookdale, and Boulder Creek. This item is on the Commission's 5/2/24 agenda.

Highway 9 is the defacto "main street" for the four town centers in the San Lorenzo Valley. The current speed limits within the town center corridors are inconsistent, causing confusion for motorists who frequently drive too fast to ensure pedestrian and cyclists' safety. Asking Caltrans to set a consistent speed limit of 25 miles per hour along the town center corridors is allowed by Assembly Bill 43 and aligns with the Highway 9/San Lorenzo Valley Complete Streets Corridor Plan.

I urge the Commission to support the staff recommendation to ask Caltrans District 5 to set a consistent 25 miles per hour speed limit within Felton, Ben Lomond, Brookdale, and Boulder Creek.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this matter.

Sincerely,

**BRUCE MCPHERSON**  
Santa Cruz County Fifth District Supervisor

To: Mitch Weiss, Interim Executive Director, SCCRTC  
From: James Helmer, Ben Lomond resident  
Subject: Restoring the posted speed limit to 25mph in Ben Lomond  
Date: March 21, 2024

Dear Mr. Weiss

On behalf of several Ben Lomond merchants and residents, I have been advocating to have the speed limit in downtown Ben Lomond restored to 25mph on State Highway 9 based upon the authority now vested to Caltrans with the signing of AB 43 into law in 2021. In a recent reply to my request the Division Chief at Caltrans in San Luis Obispo wrote:

*"I would need to hear from the County of Santa Cruz representatives in writing if they are requesting the speed limit be lowered to 25 mph based on the CVC section you're referring to and for what locations. Law enforcement would also need to support the change in writing"...*

Our request is that County representatives submit a written request to Caltrans based upon revisions in the California Vehicle Code section 22352 that now allow prima facie speed zones of 25mph in business districts on State Highways. The business district is less than 4/10 mile in length roughly between PM markers 9.29 and 9.66.

I have testified at several RTC meetings recently in an effort to remind us all that State Highway 9 serves as the "Main Street" in the Ben Lomond business district as it does in Boulder Creek and Felton (both posted at 25mph) and Brookdale (posted at 30mph). Over 15,000 vehicle trips per day pass through the short district with a posted speed limit of 30mph. The grade, sweeping curves with advisory speed postings, offset intersection at Main Street, poor walking conditions, blind driveways and only two marked crosswalks more than justified posting the district at 25mph which was the case until the town's only traffic signal was installed in the central part of the district. The primary purpose of the signal was to improve safety, slow and control traffic and aid in accessing or crossing Highway 9 by vehicle, foot or bicycle.

Following the installation of the traffic signal in the late 1990s an engineering and traffic survey was conducted by Caltrans at the required distance of 2/10 mile or greater from the signal in each direction. The measured higher speeds at the **fringes** of the district resulted in raising the speed limit in the core of the district to 30mph based upon the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile rule. Physical and unusual conditions as those described above were not taken into consideration to retain the 25mph limit.

The business district on State route 9 is bounded by bridges over the San Lorenzo River at each end. Mill Street (west of the Highway) where the only market, library, public park, day care center and Rec Hall among other businesses is separated from the vast majority of the Ben Lomond residents that live east of the Highway. There are several gaps in the sidewalk system mainly at each end of the business district as

shown in the photos below. Not only do these photos show the challenging conditions to walk along the Highway; each of the 30mph signs within the district along with the large redwood tree and rock wall have been struck by drivers that have run-off the Highway.



Photos 1 and 2: NB Highway 9 adjacent to Fire Department (new sign after crash destroyed rock wall and prior sign; festivals and public events in the 30mph zone at the Fire Department)



Photos 3 and 4: SB Highway 9 at PM 9.66 (less than 2 feet of walking space between the tree and edge line; scarred tree after head-on crash involving a heavy truck that destroyed the sign as well)

Due to sharp curves, poor lighting and lack of sidewalks, State Highway 9 entering and exiting the business district is posted with curve advisory signs posted at 25mph. Just beyond these signs within the district the regulatory speed limits are posted at 30mph.



Photos 5 and 6: NB Highway 9 at PM 9.22 entering business district with 25mph advisory sign; blind driveway on sharp curve in business district at PM 9.55

In closing, our local cities, the County and State are investing heavily in implementing “Complete Streets” solutions in an effort to improve safety for all users. Two months ago in January, Caltrans Headquarters issued Design Bulletin-94 stating: *“Caltrans recognizes the importance of Complete Streets in supporting our mission to provide a safe and reliable transportation network that **serves all people** and respects the environment”*. Residents, merchants, public officials, motorists, cyclists and pedestrians all want a safer traveling environment in all of San Lorenzo Valley. Consistent with our mission, Highway 9 in Ben Lomond should be restored to a 25mph speed limit following the intent of AB43 and community input from RTC’s Highway 9 Complete Streets Plan in 2019.

Respectfully,

James Helmer, P.E., 10885 Alba Road, Ben Lomond, CA.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James R. Helmer". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned on a light-colored background.

cc: Supervisor Mcpherson, D5