

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

Peter Schwartzman

Speeding up won't solve our problems

Just when one thought that we were coming to our senses regarding our overconsumption of gasoline, out comes the Illinois Senate with a bill to increase highway speed limits to 70 miles per hour. Just this January, Illinois increased its allowed speed for eighteen-wheelers to 65 mph (up from 55 mph). While both of these increases do/will not apply in Cook and counties surrounding Chicago, they will affect speeds over the rest of the state. So what is the big deal? Aren't we better off following the lead of our neighboring states (e.g., Missouri, Iowa, and Indiana) that all already have these higher speed limits in operation?

There are several serious problems with increasing the speed. Of these, the one that gets the most discussion is the concern that more accidents (or more fatalities per accident) will occur at faster speeds. Intuition might suggest that this is true as faster cars would have more difficulty stopping and maneuvering, both serious limitations when faced with any of the many situations drivers experience—e.g., deer running into the road, ice on shoulder, car swerving into lane, debris in lane, etc. Yet, the research seems a bit unclear about what really happens when vehicles speed. In part, the rate of highway accidents is a function of the varying speeds that vehicles are travelling just as much as the maximum speed posted. So while it is important to consider this outcome, there are clearer reasons to object to increasing speed limits.

The second and unequivocal reason that it is very problematic to raise to raise maximum speeds has to do with the extra use of fuel that it will require. Most cars maximize their efficiency between 55-60 mph. Any additional increases in speed reduce the efficiency quite substantially. If a car gets 30.0 miles per gallon (mpg) at 55 mph, then this same car will only get ~27.6 mpg at 65 mph, 24.9 mpg at 70 mpg, and 23.1 mpg at 75 mph. Thus, if one drives a this car 12,000 a year, it will require an extra ~82 gallons of gas to go 70 mph (versus 55 mph) or an extra 47 gallons of gas (versus 65 mph). An extra 47 gallons may not seem a lot but let's say that 3,000,000 cars were to do this for a year then we would be talking about an extra 141,000,000 gallons; amazingly there are nearly 6 million cars and 4 million trucks and buses in Illinois. This is a huge amount of fuel that is largely going to have to come from some foreign country (since most of our petroleum now comes from overseas) and the burning of this fuel is going to result in a huge amount of extra carbon dioxide emissions (~0.5 billion pounds). So while a small change (that is, increasing the highway speed limit by 5 mph) may not seem like a lot, when one adds up all the cars that are likely going to respond to this change by burning more gasoline, this change will be very detrimental to our energy independence as well as future climate change.

The previous two reasons are the most relevant but other secondary issues are worth mentioning, even if they aren't fully recognized/accounted for at this point. When one drives faster, one destroys tires more quickly. At faster speeds, a vehicle is also likely causing more road damage as well. When one drives faster, one is also more likely to hit a bird, squirrel, or fox in the road, as these animals will not be as able to get out of harm's way. Again, while these three things might not amount to much for one car, when one realizes just how many vehicles there are now, we can expect them to amount to something quite significant.

Outside of the reasons for not going faster, isn't it curious why this is so important now? With the economy in the tank, why we are so focused on getting highway vehicles to move faster? Aren't there more important things for our state congresspeople to be

worried about. I guess this is an attempt to make it seem that government is relaxing the laws (in other words, reducing the regulation of our lives). I, for one, am not as much interested in reducing regulation but more interested in improving the lives of people and the environment and I don't see how this change in law does this in any way.

Though slowing down to ~55 mph will improve one's efficiency, there are other ways to improve in this area. Don't gun your vehicle, ever (except in an emergency). Make sure your tires properly filled; we need more free air stations in town. Don't have extra weight in the trunk. Use cruise control, if

you have it. Also, though it sounds counter-intuitive, if you are driving on the highway, use the overdrive gear on the open road and when not in hilly terrain. All of these things will save you money and improve the fuel efficiency of your car.

In the early 1970's, it was precisely the fear of escalating gas prices and growing national insecurity stemming from the importation of foreign oil that precipitated the imposition of speed limits consistent with fuel efficiency. Somehow, forty years later, with catastrophic climate change staring down at us and multi-hundred billion dollar wars (fought over oil and other resources) collapsing our

economy, we have forgotten what got us into this mess. It isn't just about whether we'll have more accidents on the road but whether our nation will enter into a new much more efficient and less wasteful paradigm which may save us from the worst impacts of climate change and avoid putting more money into foreign oil magnates. Why aren't people up in arms about this? Perhaps we just like to drive fast way too much. For those that think a faster speed limit is a bad idea, please contact your State Representative as soon as possible; (if you're in Knox County, it's Don Moffitt, 343-8000. To find out others: <www.ilga.gov>.

THE MONMOUTH REVIEW

Richard W. Crockett

County-wide school for Warren County?

It appears to be "crunch" time. Recent events in the economy and the financial crises faced by states have impacted the effectiveness and solvency of local schools across the country. As of February 23, the *Chicago Tribune* reported "the state owes Illinois districts \$725 million for this school year with the oldest unpaid voucher dating to October." Reports appeared on March 5, 2010 from Chris Koch, Illinois State Schools Superintendent, that as many as 14,000 school employees around the state, including 6200 teachers, could be laid off due to funding shortages resulting from implementation of proposals for ten percent across the board cuts to all state agencies at the state level. Add to that the trend during recent decades in population decline in rural areas leading to school consolidation and the process seems assured to continue.

Proposals to solve these problems seem painful to some and necessary to others. There are always issues of community identity as well as the convenience of schools with grades K-12 fully contained within the local community. It may be necessary to enlarge our community horizons and our sense of what counts as "home." Warren County belongs to all of its residents as "home."

Potentially large financial issues confront both the Monmouth-Roseville and United school districts. The Monmouth-Roseville district might have been looking at a 3.5 million dollar addition to their 100-year-old high school building, but that does not seem feasible right now. In theory, Monmouth's building is old enough to qualify for 70 percent state funding for its replacement, but keep in mind the financial condition of the State of Illinois. United is facing potential life safety issues, as defined by the state, concerning the old Alexis gymnasium and could face the need for expenditure for a new gymnasium in Alexis, but most likely on the Warren Campus.

It is time for both boards of education to look at the advantages and disadvantage, each from their own point of view, of a combined single countywide school district, before spending monies within their individual districts only needing to face rethinking the matter after having already spent large sums. The two districts already have surplus, dated infrastructure, and the last thing they need to do is add more.

There are clearly pluses and minuses to any such consolidation plan. What follows is an outline of a consolidation study that has been circulating throughout the community and the advantages offered. The minuses are not completely itemized, but the most potent one is emotional, having to do with the perceived "tearing away" of what is old and familiar. But consolidation may provide a way of maintaining some local community

identity in the early grades. The countywide plan would retire several older schools that are high maintenance facilities. This could be an opportune time for each board to assess the direction of their school with a countywide option. In the interest of full disclosure, I should say that I have lived in Monmouth most of my life and graduated from Monmouth High School before the creation of the Warren district. I also taught the first two years of my teaching career at Warren High School, from 1961-63. Before that, while the place was being built, I helped to paint it. So I have loyalties to both districts.

The study offered appears to be a thoughtful analysis giving seven reasons for a consolidated district. In order, they are **quality education, transportation time, financial issues, a single location for all sports at each school, a self-contained vocational school facility, some parental advantages, as well as other pressing current and critical issues.**

A consolidated district could offer a higher **quality of education** through a stronger college curriculum. Many more classes and areas of study could be available. Larger numbers of students in the more technical classes would provide greater efficiencies in such classes being offered. A consolidated district could offer an excellent in-house vocational program, and could develop a vocational curriculum, something sorely needed in a time of declining manufacturing and rising college tuitions. A consolidated district could offer programs, which would best suit students from varied backgrounds. The district may be in a position to contract with other nearby districts, for example West Central, to provide vocational courses. The district could offer a special education curriculum "in-house," and reduce the need for outside contracting services. All school activities would be held on campus, which would allow a second bus following activities and practices to deliver students to the smaller communities when the events are over. Increased teacher/student time together would most likely result in greater learning and would result from the reduction in time spent on a bus.

An added note on **transportation** times; reduced transportation time for students sitting in buses or waiting for a transfer bus can be drastically reduced with the new arrangement of schools. Bus scheduling in a consolidated district would be significantly improved for both the students and the administration.

The study suggested five areas of **financial advantage** through consolidation. It recommends using existing buildings and facilities as much as possible. Only one new facility is envisioned, the high school. The combined school district would have

the tax base of five former districts, Alexis Warren, Roseville, Yorkwood and Monmouth. Efficiencies will be gained by eliminating the most inefficient building and keeping the most efficient in the system. Class sizes could become more uniform with class size adjustments where needed and not to be constrained by old school district boundaries. Finally, large cuts in transportation costs resulting from improved busing routes would be possible.

Elimination of some internal busing within the district could be achieved. In the case of United, busing back and forth between Alexis and United for athletic practices and games could be eliminated allowing for more coaching and practice time, leading potentially to more wins. The **only busing of this nature would be for "away" games outside the district.**

A **vocational school within the district** could eliminate the need to bus students to Galesburg for vocational school, in this case from both United and Monmouth-Roseville high schools and then bus them back and then home. A significant amount of the lost time could be reclaimed for students for educational purposes.

Parental advantages exist in some measure. Being close to restaurants, stores, banks, pharmacies and grocery stores is often desirable for parents that are following their children's events.

A note on the high school location It should be either on the bypass near Monmouth if a new one is constructed or at the location of the Warren campus. Both locations are in the "center" of the county. It may be that the Warren facility could be used for the high school and new construction could be put off. The study also suggests that one, two or three Junior High Schools are plausible, but more on that next week.

Some **current and critical issues** involve the stability of state funding, the potential elimination of "hold harmless" statutes which assure a declining district that their funding allocation remains at levels received during periods of greater enrollments, and finally the possibility that either district could become insolvent.

I would conclude with the view that grade schools should remain open in the small communities. I am thinking particularly of Alexis and Roseville. Nothing would prevent Monmouth-Roseville from closing Willits if that appears necessary, but in the interest of the communities an elementary school should remain open in both Alexis and Roseville. The closing of a community school in rural communities can be devastating to a community, but more importantly, such a decision is politically unwise. The insistence upon any plan because of its esthetic perfection will not work in a messy world.