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Texas studies 85 mph speed limit, fastest in U.S.

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By Jim Forsyth

SAN ANTONIO (Reuters) - A stretch of highway under construction in Texas could be the first U.S. road to have a posted 85 mile per hour speed limit, according to the Texas Department of Transportation.

Texas State Highway 130 will run between San Antonio and Austin with the aim of taking traffic loads off of Interstate 35. The major north-south highway was named the fourth most congested road in the state by the Texas Department of Transportation last year.

Most of Highway 130 is built - and speed limits are posted at 80 mph - with the remaining section set to open before the end of this year.

"We'll definitely take a look at that stretch, and we will conduct speed studies to see what that speed limit will be," Darren McDaniel, the Texas Department of Transportation's speed management director, said at a conference this week.

The Texas Legislature passed a law last year that allowed speed limits of up to 85 mph on newly constructed highways that were determined to be safe enough to allow such speeds.

Texas and Utah are currently the only states with speed limits of 80 mph.

The 85 mph speed limit would be the fastest posted maximum in the Western Hemisphere and the second fastest in the world, according to Rhino Car Hire, a European car rental company. It said a speed of 140 kilometers per hour, or about 86 mph, is posted on some roads in Poland.

Before the federally mandated 55 mph speed limit was approved in 1974, several Western states had high speed limits, and Montana and Nevada had some roads with no posted speed limits at all. Germany's Autobahn system has no posted speed limits for passenger cars, but speed is restricted for other types of vehicles.

Critics say higher speed limits will lead to more fatal accidents, but McDaniel said the safest roads are ones where all motorists are traveling the same speed.

Studies of drivers on that stretch of highway now show most are traveling about 85 mph, he said.

"The more people we can get to travel a uniform speed, the safer are the conditions that will exist," McDaniel said on Wednesday at the annual Texas Transportation Institute road safety conference in San Antonio.

Officials first proposed the 85 mph speed limit on a now cancelled toll road project, in hopes that it would convince more motorists to choose toll roads, and lessen congestion on free stretches of highway.

(Editing by [Paul Thomasch](#) and [Leslie Gevirtz](#))

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