

CHAPTER V.

ATTITUDES ABOUT SPEED LIMITS

CURRENT SPEED LIMITS — TOO HIGH, TOO LOW, ABOUT RIGHT?

Drivers were asked their opinions of the speed limits on various types of roads (see Table 5-1). Overall, at least three-quarters of drivers felt that the speed limits on the five road types considered in this series of questions were about right. Four out of five drivers (82%) felt that speed limits on residential or neighborhood streets were about right. Three-quarters of drivers (76%) felt the speed limits on interstate highways were about right. Drivers were somewhat more satisfied with speed limits on non-interstate roads in urban areas (85%) than in rural areas (78%).

Although the majority of drivers believed current speed limits were about right on all of these road types, a minority felt that current speed limits were too high or too low. One driver in 10 (10%) felt that speed limits on residential or neighborhood streets were too high, compared to 7% who felt they were too low. This was the highest rating of “too high” given to any road type and the only road type where responses of “too high” outnumbered responses of “too low.” In addition, similar opinions were given by both males and females. Among the 25 to 34 age group, the group most likely to have the largest number of small children, 17% felt that speeds were too high, with 5% responding “too low.”

The second highest rating where speed limits were considered too high, 9%, was for interstate highways in urban areas. For this road type, 13% responded that speeds were too low. There was also less agreement between males and females — females felt speeds were too high (11% versus 8%) and males felt speeds were too low (15% versus 12%).

Interstate highways in rural areas received the highest mention, 17%, of speed limits being too low. This was the highest rating of “too low” given to any road type. Even though for both males and females ratings of “too low” outpolled ratings of “too high,” there were major differences of opinion on the speed limits between the genders. Twice as many females (8%) as males (4%) felt speed limits were too high. Conversely, more males (21%) than females (13%) felt that speeds on rural interstates were too low.

The second highest mention of speed limits being too low (13%) versus too high (5%) was for non-interstate roads in rural areas. While there were differences between the genders on opinions of the speed limits of these roads, they were not as dramatic as those seen for the rural interstates.

Lastly, almost equal numbers of males and females felt that speed limits on non-interstate roads in urban areas were both too high and too low. Five drivers in six (85%) felt the speed limits on these roads were about right.

TABLE 5-1

Opinions of Speed Limits on Various Road Types by Gender			
<i>Qx: In general, do you think that speed limits on [road type] are too high, too low, or about right?</i>			
<i>Base: Total population of drivers.</i>			
	Total*	Male	Female
<i>Unweighted N</i>	1,489	707	782
Interstate highways in rural areas			
Too high	6%	4%	8%
Too low	17%	21%	13%
About right	76%	73%	78%
Interstate highways in urban areas			
Too high	9%	8%	11%
Too low	13%	15%	12%
About right	76%	76%	75%
Residential or neighborhood streets			
Too high	10%	11%	10%
Too low	7%	7%	7%
About right	82%	81%	82%
Non-interstate roads in rural areas			
Too high	5%	4%	6%
Too low	13%	16%	11%
About right	78%	78%	78%
Non-interstate roads in urban areas			
Too high	5%	5%	5%
Too low	6%	6%	6%
About right	85%	87%	83%

* Totals do not include responses of "don't know" or refusals.

EFFECT OF CHANGING SPEED LIMITS

As was discussed in Section IV of this report, drivers were categorized by the type of road they drive frequently. The next series of tables reports responses to questions concerning the effects of increasing the speed limits on each of these roads. The first question asks drivers **how fast they would drive** if the posted speed limit were increased by 10 miles per hour (see Table 5-2).

TABLE 5-2

Effect of a 10 MPH Increase in the Posted Speed Limits on Driving Speed by Road Type						
<i>Qx: If the posted limits were INCREASED BY 10 MILES PER HOUR on [road type], do you think you would normally drive ... ?</i>						
<i>Base: Total population of drivers.</i>						
	Residential		Non-Interstate		Interstate	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
<i>Unweighted N</i>	692	426	495	446	453	311
Slower	56%	54%	38%	50%	31%	40%
Much slower than the limit	15%	13%	4%	6%	5%	8%
A little slower than the limit	41%	40%	33%	44%	26%	32%
Right at the limit	37%	36%	51%	42%	54%	44%
Faster	6%	9%	10%	8%	15%	15%
A little faster than the limit	6%	8%	10%	8%	14%	15%
Much faster than the limit	-	*	*	-	*	*
Don't know/refuse	*	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%

* less than .5%.

- None.

Total may not equal 100% due to rounding.

If posted speed limits were increased by 10 miles per hour, over half of the drivers of residential streets, regardless of the setting, would drive at least a little slower than the posted speed limit. A little over one-third of drivers felt they would drive at the posted speed limit. Only 9% of drivers of rural residential roads and 6% of urban residential road drivers would drive faster than the limit as a result of the increase in the posted speed limit.

Drivers were asked their opinion of the **impact on safety** of increasing the posted speed limit by 10 miles per hour on the selected road. Regardless of road type or setting, less than one driver in 10 felt that increasing the posted speed limit would make the roads safer (see Table 5-3). Three drivers in four felt that increasing the speed limit on residential streets would make these streets more dangerous; one-third of the drivers felt it would make it much more dangerous.

TABLE 5-3

Effect of a 10 MPH Increase in the Posted Speed Limits on Safety by Road Type						
<i>Qx: If the posted limits for that road were INCREASED BY 10 MILES PER HOUR, do you think that it would make driving on the road ... ?</i>						
<i>Base: Total population of drivers.</i>						
	Residential		Non-Interstate		Interstate	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
<i>Unweighted N</i>	692	426	495	446	453	311
Safer	6%	6%	8%	6%	7%	8%
Much safer	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	3%
Somewhat safer	4%	4%	6%	4%	6%	5%
No difference	17%	18%	30%	24%	31%	30%
More dangerous	76%	74%	60%	70%	61%	61%
Somewhat more dangerous	43%	42%	40%	45%	41%	35%
Much more dangerous	34%	33%	20%	25%	20%	26%
Don't know/refuse	*	1%	2%	1%	1%	*

* less than .5%.

Total may not equal 100% due to rounding.

More drivers felt that it would be dangerous to increase speed limits on non-interstate rural roads (70%) than on the same roads in urban settings (60%). Six drivers in 10 (61%) felt that increasing the speed limit on interstates, regardless of the setting, would make these roads more dangerous.

For the most part, drivers felt that increasing the speed limit by 10 miles an hour would **make driving less comfortable** (see Table 5-4). A majority (51%) of drivers felt it would make driving less comfortable on residential roads in urban areas. The proportion of drivers who felt increasing the posted limit would make driving less comfortable dropped slightly (46%) for rural residential drivers.

TABLE 5-4

Effect of a 10 MPH Increase in the Posted Speed Limits on Driving Comfort by Road Type						
<i>Qx: If the posted limits for that road were INCREASED BY 10 MILES PER HOUR, do you think that it would make driving on the road ... ?</i>						
<i>Base: Total population of drivers.</i>						
	Residential		Non-Interstate		Interstate	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
<i>Unweighted N</i>	692	426	495	446	453	311
More comfortable	14%	16%	26%	17%	23%	20%
Much more comfortable	3%	3%	6%	3%	9%	9%
Somewhat more comfortable	11%	13%	20%	14%	13%	11%
No difference	34%	39%	36%	40%	35%	37%
Less comfortable	51%	46%	37%	43%	41%	43%
Somewhat less comfortable	27%	24%	22%	24%	23%	24%
Much less comfortable	24%	22%	15%	19%	18%	18%
Don't know/refuse	1%	*	1%	-	1%	*

* less than .5%.

- None.

Total may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Drivers of non-interstate roads are almost evenly divided in their opinions that increasing the speed limit by 10 miles per hour would make driving less comfortable or make no difference. One driver in four (26%), however, felt that driving on non-interstate roads in urban areas would be more comfortable if the limit was increased.

About one in five interstate drivers felt a 10 mile per hour increase would make driving on these roads more comfortable. About twice as many drivers felt an increase would make driving less comfortable, while the remaining drivers felt it would make no difference.

Overall, regardless of road type, two drivers in five (41%) felt a 10 mile per hour increase in the posted speed limit would make driving somewhat more dangerous (see Table 5-5). Almost equal proportions feel driving would be much more dangerous (26%) or there would be no impact on safety (24%). Half (2.6% of 5.4%) of the drivers who felt that any increase in the speed limit would make driving much more comfortable felt there would be no difference in safety, and an additional one in three felt driving would either be somewhat safer (0.8% of 5.4%) or much safer (1.1% of 5.4%).

TABLE 5-5

Effect of a 10 MPH Increase in the Posted Speed Limits: Safety versus Comfort

Qx: If the posted limits INCREASED BY 10 MILES AN HOUR, do you think it would make driving on the road much safer, somewhat safer, no different, somewhat more dangerous, or much more dangerous?

Qx: If the posted limits INCREASED BY 10 MILES AN HOUR, do you think it would make driving on the road much more comfortable for you, somewhat more comfortable, no different, somewhat less comfortable, or much less comfortable?

Base: Total population of drivers.

Change in Safety	Change in Comfort						
	Total	Much More	Some-what More	No Differ-ent	Some-what Less	Much Less	Don't Know
<i>Unweighted N</i>	3,000	158	391	1,092	730	609	20
Much Safer	2.0%	1.1%	0.2%	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%	-
Somewhat Safer	5.0%	0.8%	2.0%	1.6%	0.4%	0.2%	-
No Different	24.3%	2.6%	6.5%	13.4%	1.4%	0.3%	*
Somewhat More Dangerous	41.2%	0.5%	4.1%	16.8%	15.9%	3.8%	0.2%
Much More Dangerous	26.4%	0.3%	0.7%	4.0%	6.1%	15.2%	0.2%
Don't Know/Refuse	1.0%	0.1%	0.2%	0.4%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%
Total	100.0%	5.4%	13.7%	36.5%	24.1%	19.7%	0.6%

- None; * Less than 0.05%

Total may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Almost half (6.5% of 13.7%) of drivers who would be somewhat more comfortable with a 10 mile per hour increase in the posted speed limit felt the increase would make no difference in safety. None the less, a sizable proportion of these drivers (4.1% of 13.7%) felt the increase would be somewhat more dangerous.

Among drivers who felt the increase in the posted speed limit would make no difference in driving comfort, slightly less than half (16.8% of 36.5%) said such an increase would make driving slightly more dangerous. Less than two drivers in five (13.4% of 36.5%) feel there would be no difference in driving safety.

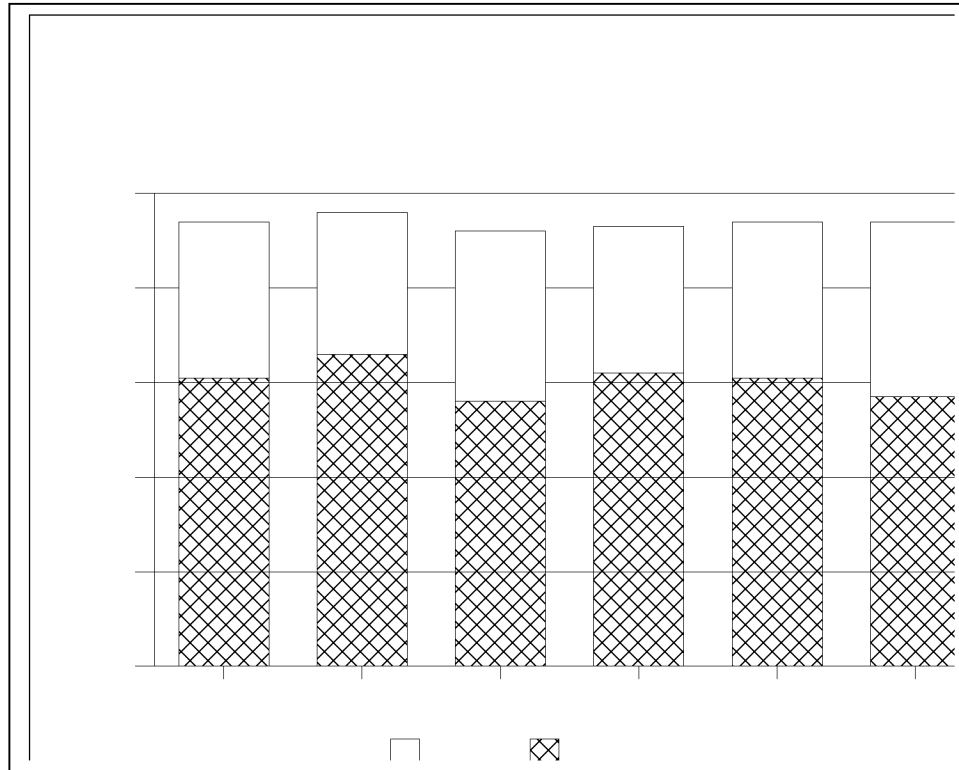
Two-thirds (15.9% of 24.1%) of drivers who feel increasing the speed limit would make driving somewhat less comfortable felt the increase would make driving somewhat more dangerous. An additional one in four (6.1% of 24.1%) of these drivers felt driving would be much more dangerous.

All but a handful of the drivers who felt that a 10 mile per hour increase in the speed limit would make driving much less comfortable felt the increase would also make driving either much more dangerous (15.2 of 19.7%) or somewhat more dangerous (3.8% of 19.7%).

The general population of drivers felt that a 10 mile an hour increase in the posted speed limit would be both more dangerous and decrease driving comfort.

In 1974, speed limits on interstate highways were reduced to 55 miles per hour. Recently, states were given the option to increase the speed limits on these roads. Drivers were asked if speed limits on interstate roadways had increased in any areas in their state where they drive. Overall, three drivers in five (61%) report speed limits have been increased on interstate roadways in areas that they drive (see Figure 5-1).

FIGURE 5-1



Qx: You may be aware that the National Speed Limit law was repealed. Have the speed limits on interstates affected by that law been increased in your state in any areas in which you drive?

Base: Total population of drivers.

Unweighted N=6,000

Drivers who had driven on interstate highways where the speed limit had been increased were asked a follow-up question— if they felt more drivers obeyed the increased speed limits. Slightly less than half the drivers (45%) agreed that more drivers were driving within the speed limits (see Table 5-6). About one in five of these drivers (22%) felt that a lot more drivers were driving within the new limits. The remaining drivers were split, feeling that some more drivers (12%) and a few more drivers (10%) were obeying the new limits. Half the drivers (50%) felt there had been no change in the number of drivers staying within the speed limit.

TABLE 5-6

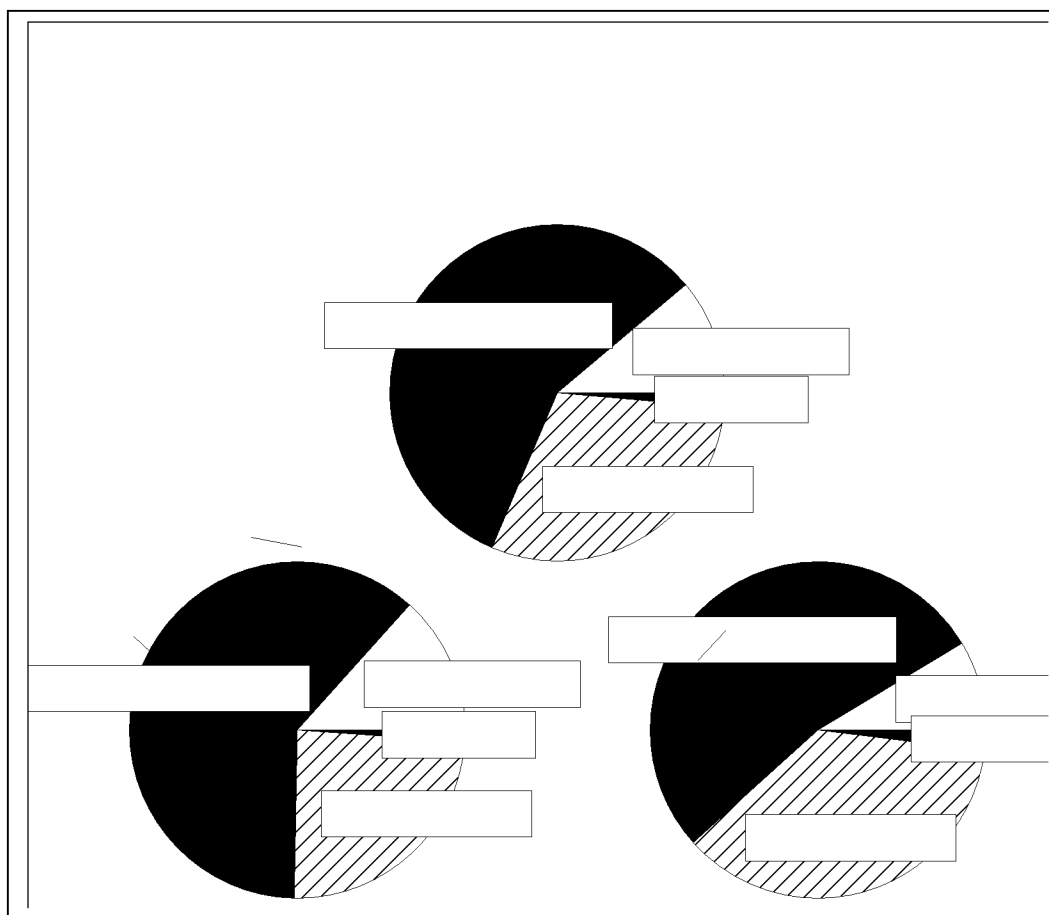
How Higher Limits Have Effectuated the Number of Speeders by Gender			
<i>Qx: How have the higher limits on those roads affected the number of people who speed?</i>			
<i>Base: Interstate speed limits is increased on roads in which drive on as a result of National Maximum Speed Limit law repeal.</i>			
	Total	Male	Female
<i>Unweighted N</i>	3,651	1,904	1,747
More drivers obey new limits	45%	47%	42%
A lot more drivers	22%	24%	20%
Some more drivers	12%	12%	12%
Only a few more	10%	11%	10%
About the same as the old law	50%	49%	50%
Fewer now	1%	1%	2%
Don't know/refuse	4%	2%	6%

Total may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Slightly more males (47%) than females (42%) felt that more drivers were obeying the new limit. The difference carries over to those who felt there were a lot more drivers obeying the new laws — 24% of males versus 20% of females.

These drivers were also asked if they felt the interstate highways were more or less safe as a result of increasing the posted speed limit. Overall, more than half (57%) felt the interstates were about as safe as before the limit was increased (see Figure 5-2). Further, 30% of the drivers felt the increased limits made the roads less safe while 11% said they were safer.

FIGURE 5-2



Qx: Do you think that driving on those roads is safer now with the higher limits, about the same, or less safe than with the old limits?

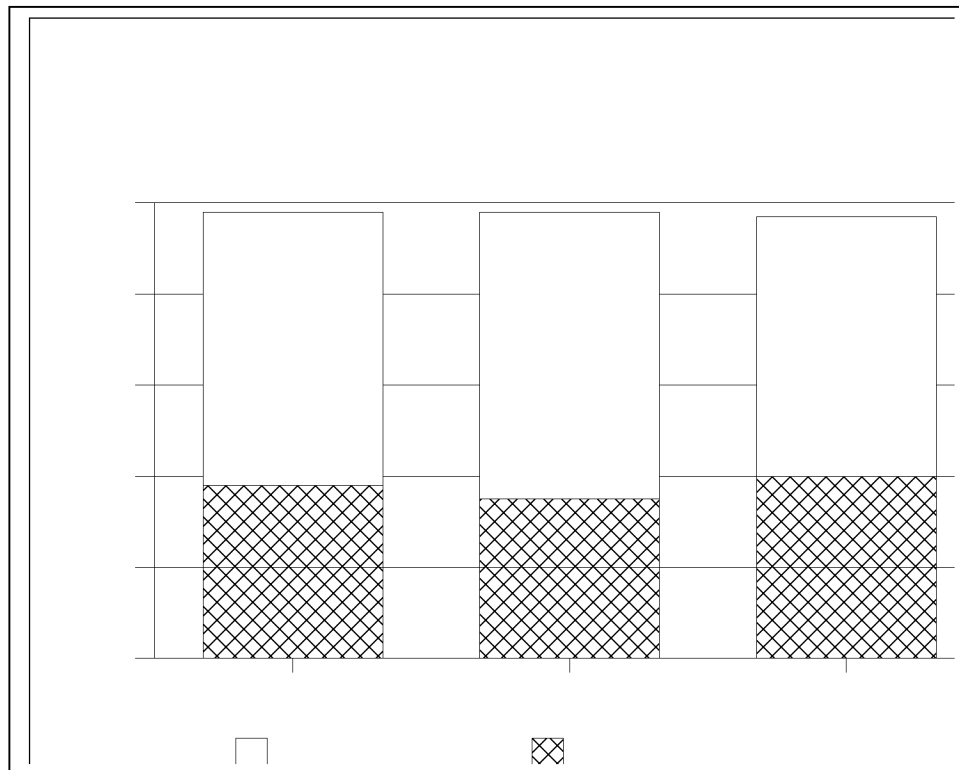
Base: Speed limits on interstate roadways in which drive on have increased as a result of National Maximum Speed Limit law repeal.

Unweighted N=3,651

Males, more so than females, felt the interstates were about as safe (61% of males versus 53% of females) or safer (13% versus 9%) as a result of the increased speed limits. Women, on the other hand, felt the increased speed limit on interstates made the roads less safe (37% of females versus 24% of males).

All drivers were asked their opinion about a uniform speed limit for interstate roads. Specifically, they were asked if they felt there should be a uniform speed limit across the nation or if the speed limit should be allowed to vary by state. Overall, three drivers in five (60%) feel the limits should be allowed to vary from state to state (Figure 5-3).

FIGURE 5-3



Qx: Do you think that a uniform speed should be set for all interstate highways or should it be allowed to vary from state to state?

Base: Total population of drivers.

Unweighted N=6,000

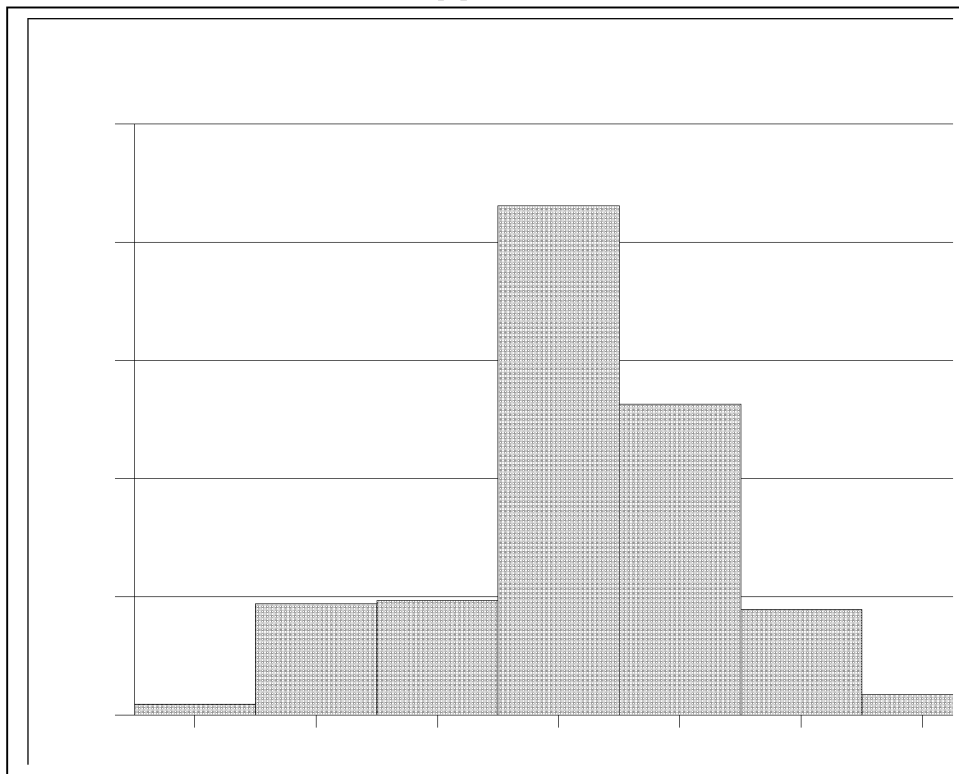
More males (63%) than females (57%) were willing to allow speed limits to vary by state.

With the exception of those age 65 and over, every age group favored allowing the limit to vary by state. Fully three-quarters (75%) of drivers in the 16 to 20 age group favor this option. This decreases to 69% of the 21 to 24 group, to 65% of those 25 to 29, to 59% of those 35 to 44, and then tapering to 50% of those 65 and over.

Drivers who felt there should be a uniform speed limit for interstate highways were asked what the speed limit should be. Most preferred 65 or 70 miles per hour (see Figure 5-4). Overall, the mean (arithmetic average) speed limit was 66 miles per hour while the median was 68 miles per hour.

Males opted for only a slightly higher uniform speed limit for interstate highways than females — mean 67 versus 65; median 70 versus 68.

FIGURE 5-4



Qx: *What do you think that speed limit should be for interstate highways?*

Base: *All interstate highways should have a uniform speed limit.*

Unweighted N= 2,270

SUMMARY

Over three-fourths of drivers felt that speed limits were about right for most road types. Most drivers felt that increased speed limits would be more dangerous and less comfortable, no matter which road type. In respect to the recent increase in speed limits, drivers were almost equally divided between those who felt that more drivers were driving within the posted limits, and those who felt that the number of drivers obeying the new limits had not changed. Although drivers were generally satisfied with present speed limits, the majority felt 65 to 70 miles per hour was a satisfactory speed for interstate highways.

