Traffic Management Advisory Committee
Traffic Control Information

There are approximately 23,000 vehicles registered in Needham. Not all Needham vehicles are likely to be used at the same time, even during the morning and evening rush hours. However, a great number of people from other towns use Needham streets as well. Our streets play the dual role of providing access to homes, work and schools while providing passage for through traffic. Over the years, professional and governmental entities have studied the interrelationships between the driver, vehicle, road, traffic, public transportation and the abutting land use to establish norms and rules to make this co-existence effective and safe. These norms and rules have been codified by the Federal Highway Administration and by the Massachusetts Highway Department as "warrants" and engineering standards. The following is a summary of some of the most common traffic controls:

1.   *Speed Limits and Controls* - The "prima facie" statewide speed limit in thickly settled areas (almost all of Needham) is 30 miles per hour.

2.   *"Slow" or "Slow Children" Signs* - Such signs are largely meaningless and mandate no specific speed. Motorists adapt their speed and driving behavior to what they see.

3.   *Pedestrian Crossing* -. In order to designate and paint a pedestrian crossing, it must meet warrants relative to the number of pedestrians habitually crossing, and it must not be located within an easy walking distance of another marked pedestrian crossing. This can be effective when painted or if different pavers (such as bricks) are used in the roadway in addition to signs. The approximate cost of one crosswalk is in excess of $10,000 due to the required granite curbing and ramps.

4.   *"Stop" Sign or Red Flashing Light* – The intersection must meet the warrant for the number of vehicles in order for the Town to install a stop sign or red flashing light. The traffic count must be much higher on one of the streets. The "Stop" sign is placed on the street with the least amount of traffic.

5.   *"Yield" Sign* – This sign is used to indicated which of two intersecting streets has the right-of-way. This sign is widely used in Europe, but is less popular in the United States. Serious accidents can occur when the Yield sign is not observed.

6.   *"Blind Curve" sign* – The obstruction to visibility must be due to street layout or topography, and not to vegetation which can be cleared. The blind curve sign can be accompanied by an advisory speed plate.

7.   *"No Right/Left Turn" Sign* – This sign should be used for safe and necessary channeling of traffic, and not for the convenience of residents on one street.

8. *Non-signalized Intersections* - Drivers are more alert at non-signalized intersections because they cannot rely on signs, thus enhancing safety. The vehicle reaching the intersection first has the right of way; when both vehicles approach the intersection at approximately the same time, the vehicle on the right side has the right of way.

9. *Signalized Intersections* – Traffic signals are installed only when warrant and accident information indicate a sufficient need. The cost of one signalized intersection is approximately $250,000.

The Traffic Management Advisory Committee has established a policy of not recommending signs which list the prima facie speed limit, or "Slow" or "Slow Children" signs, because they have been proven to be ineffective. The proliferation of signs detracts from the appearance of the town. Speed monitoring devices posted around the town have proven that the vast majority of drivers do not exceed the 30 mile per hour speed limit. They have also shown that motorists and pedestrians estimate the speed of cars to be higher than the actual speed shown on the odometer or speed detection unit. Police enforcement, the mobile speed detection unit, improving the traffic capacity of our main thoroughfares and the education of the public are the key tools in managing our traffic problems. We must all learn to become patient, careful, courteous drivers who are guided by road conditions and usage.