Traffic calming makes streets safer

On Tuesday, we noted Pottstown Borough has recently reduced speed limits on Industrial Highway and Charlotte Street to 25 miles per hour. The faster cars go in urban areas, the more likely they are to crash into walkers, bicyclists and other cars. Injuries are likely to be more severe.

Lowering speed limits is legally necessary to require motorists to slow down, but it doesn't guarantee motorists will actually reduce their speed. In recent decades, traffic engineers have recognized that physical changes to the streets are needed to force motorists to obey posted limits.

Angle parking on High Street is an example of traffic calming. The street was reduced from two lanes to one lane plus a turning lane in each direction, physically narrowing the street. The addition of bike lanes also encouraged motorists to slow down.

Lane striping: Streets can be made to seem narrower simply by painting lines defining the lanes. For this reason, bike lanes slow down traffic even if no bicyclists are using them.

Speed humps and bumps, a raised surface in the street, forces motorists to slow down.

Bump outs, usually found at intersections, extend the sidewalk area into the street. They force motorists to slow down and decrease the distance pedestrians must walk to cross the street.

Chokers: bump outs in mid-block.

Median barriers are raised concrete surfaces in the center of the street which narrow the travel lanes.

Driver feedback signs, as shown at right on Charlotte Street, remind the driver how fast he is going. These have been shown to increase compliance with posted speed limits.

As Pottstown strives to become safer and more pedestrian and bicycle friendly, expect to see these and other similar devices in the future.

PARKING LOTS are the most common example of traffic calming. Because motorists and walkers share the same space, cars drive slowly before parking.

These changes are known as traffic calming, defined by the Institute of Transportation Engineers as "mainly physical measures that reduce the negative effects of motor vehicle use, alter driver behavior and improve conditions for non-motorized street users."

PROTECTED BICYCLE LANES IN THE NETHERLANDS are shown, left, and the new Schuylkill River Greenway extension along the Industrial Highway, currently under construction, is at right. By narrowing the Industrial Highway to make room for the greenway, traffic engineers are also making the road safer for cars by slowing down auto traffic.