

# *The Land of Ferrari and Lamborghini Has a New Speed Limit: 30 K.P.H.*

Bologna has become the first major Italian city to impose the limit on most streets, citing safety and livability. But it's too slow for some: "A city has to move," one cabby complained.

**By Elisabetta Povoledo**

Reporting from Bologna, Italy

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When Bologna became the first major Italian city to impose a speed limit of 30 kilometers, or 20 miles, an hour, Luca Mazzoli, a local taxi driver, posted a sign in his cab warning passengers of the change.

He had to, he said grumpily the other day, "to explain why I am driving so slowly."

Since the limit became enforceable in mid-January, it has taken longer for Mr. Mazzoli to get from Point A to Point B, he claimed, meaning that he has picked up fewer passengers and has found himself stuck in traffic more often.

“A city has to move,” he said.

Critics of the measure say that Bologna risks slowing to a standstill since it became the first major Italian city to join a growing group of municipalities, including Amsterdam; Bilbao, Spain; Brussels; and Lyon, France, that have lowered speed limits from 50 kilometers per hour, about 30 miles per hour, in the belief that the change will lead to safer, healthier and more livable cities.

Bologna’s mayor, Matteo Lepore, included the new speed limit among the campaign promises that helped to get him elected in 2021. Referring to the lower limit, he said, “Driving at 30 is part of a vision of a more democratic and more sustainable use of public space,” where neighborhoods put children and older people first, and investments favor bike paths and public transportation to work toward carbon neutrality.



According to Bologna's mayor, Matteo Lepore, "Driving at 30 is part of a vision of a more democratic and more sustainable use of public space." Max Cavallari/EPA, via Shutterstock

What's more, he added during an interview in his art-filled office in City Hall, Italian cities had been built over centuries and were unsuited for a glut of automobiles.

There is also the question of safety. Slower speeds made for fewer deaths, Mr. Lepore said, noting that there had been about 60 traffic-related fatalities in the greater Bologna area in 2022. "Given that, it's hard to argue that the use of private cars should be without limits," he said.

But persuading the locals has been a bumpy ride. Bologna is the capital of a region that is home to the

makers of some of the fastest and most glamorous cars in the world, including Ferrari, Lamborghini and Pagani.



By The New York Times

There have been protests, both on the streets and on social media (memes and all), and a petition to hold a referendum on the new speed limit has accumulated just over 53,000 signatures.

The petition was begun by Guendalina Furini, a student at the University of Bologna who was concerned that her daily 25-mile commute into the city would increase substantially. She said that the new limit was “difficult to maintain” and would eventually deter people from visiting Bologna because the risk of getting a

ticket was so high.

“The city risks losing out,” she said.

Other protesters said that the real safety risk was having to pay attention to the speed limit on the dashboard, which meant that eyes were not on the road.



The Lamborghini museum at the carmaker’s factory in Sant’Agata Bolognese, near Bologna. Federico Borella for The New York Times

“People are very angry,” said Giorgio Gorza, who heads a citizen’s group that has been organizing protests.

To make things worse, he added, the enforcement of the speed limit has coincided with traffic delays from construction work on new tram lines around the city, as well as a detour downtown after one of Bologna's distinctive towers had to be cordoned off.

A protest on Tuesday evening brought many dozens of cranky citizens and cabbies to the streets, where they drove at a snail's pace in a makeshift parade, loudly honking horns and snarling traffic. The new speed limit "is impossible" to drive at, said Mr. Gorza, an organizer of the protest.

"It's like standing still, and no one takes a car if you're going to stay still, if it takes longer than walking," he said in a telephone interview on Wednesday. "It's illogical."

The discontent has been a windfall for the city's center-right opposition, which has jumped on the protests ahead of European Union elections in June, and on Monday called for a referendum on the limit.

The opposition's jibes have been amplified by the Italian transport minister, Matteo Salvini, leader of the hard-right League party, who has called the Bologna limit "senseless." Last week, Mr. Salvini signed a directive that challenged a city's right to impose a blanket limit of 30 kilometers per hour, arguing, among other things, that restrictions should be decided on a street-by-street basis. Legal experts have been debating the weight that the directive could have on a city's decisions, and the dispute could play out in the courts.

Bologna City Hall responded to the directive by noting in a statement that its speed limits were in line with existing national legislation. "Our priority is road safety and people's quality of life," the statement said.

Mr. Lepore noted during the interview that the new limit affected only 70 percent of the city, with the remaining roads retaining limits of 50 or 70 kilometers per hour. He said the city was open to "corrections"

on the speed limit, but not before a period of monitoring.



Discontent with the speed limit has been a windfall for the center-right opposition in Bologna, which has jumped on the protests ahead of European Union elections in June. Daniele Corda/Shutterstock

During the first two weeks, only 25 speeding tickets had been issued, according to City Hall. In this phase, “We’re more about informing rather than giving fines,” Mr. Lepore said.

In 2021, Olbia, in Sardinia, became the first Italian city to set a broad limit of 30 kilometers an hour. There, too, the initial reactions were harsh, recalled the mayor, Settimo Nizzi.

“But it’s right for a mayor to think of the quality of life of his citizens,” Mr. Nizzi said. For months, officials worked alongside residents to extol the benefits of a more walkable, bike-friendly city, “to get them used to this new style of living,” he added.

Walking “is so much better for you,” Mr. Nizzi noted, and now people in Olbia “are happier.”

In Bologna, there are indications that the limit is already having an impact. According to the city, traffic accidents were down 21 percent in the first two weeks of the new limit’s coming into force, compared with the same period last year, which included a fatality. None of the accidents this year have been deadly, according to a city statement issued last week.

Mr. Lepore said he, too, was certain that the positive results of his measure would soon become apparent.

“It won’t take long for people to understand that it was the right choice,” he said.

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