

About this series

The Sun Sentinel set out to document and quantify the problem of speeding police last fall. Obtaining and analyzing the data took two months. Reporters shared their findings with police departments and sheriff's offices, and requested their reactions and explanations.

The newspaper approached state transportation officials in November and asked for SunPass toll records for 16 South Florida police agencies. The officials initially refused, but ultimately agreed that police officers' transponder readings are public.

SunPass provided toll records from 3,915 transponders registered to the law enforcement agencies. Each record contained the date, location and time that a vehicle passed through a toll plaza from October 2010 through November 2011. The times are synchronized with the U.S. Naval Observatory's master clock in Washington D.C.

Reporters measured the distance between toll plazas by driving the routes with a satellite-based GPS receiver that's manufactured by Garmin and accurate to within nine feet.

Some less-traveled routes were measured on Google Maps, which in tests produced the same results as the Garmin.

Average speeds were then calculated based on the distance and time it took a vehicle to go from one toll plaza to the next.

The Sun Sentinel focused on the fastest driving, using a cutoff of 90 mph or higher — speeds that most motorists would consider excessive.

Many more cops routinely drove 80 to 90 mph on toll roads, well above the maximum 70 mph speed limit.

The findings are a partial picture of police driving habits. Many of the most well-traveled routes and interstates in South Florida are not toll roads, and therefore have no SunPass readings.

Also, not all police cars are equipped with department-issued transponders. At the Broward Sheriff's Office, for instance, most road deputies have personal SunPass accounts, and those records were not available because they are not public record.

Coral Springs was one of four police agencies with no speeds above 90 mph. The three others — Boynton Beach, Delray Beach and Miramar — each had six or fewer transponders, so data were limited.

None of the agencies disputed the analysis, but Miami Beach police questioned the top speed identified on one of their vehicles and said the car was not capable of going that fast. Said the department's assistant chief, Raymond Martinez: "We feel overall that the picture that is painted is a clear picture."

— *Sally Kestin and John Maines*