DRIVING DOWN FATALITIES
TOOLS FOR LIFE

AASHTO – NCHRP Project 17-18

LIFELINES

Vol. 2, No. 1 February 2005

Peer Exchange Sessions Prove Valuable

Trading Experiences, Learning How Others Are Faring In Developing Comprehensive Highway Safety Plans

For the representatives of 47 states, the meeting in Overland Park, Kansas, in mid-October to review progress toward comprehensive highway safety plans provided a bounty of help and good information. And it gave them an opportunity to let others know what more they need to be successful.

Officials met for two days, reviewing progress in the states' efforts to develop comprehensive highway safety plans (CHSP). The meeting was organized around intensive information and idea exchanges that helped to clarify what constitutes a good comprehensive plan and how to put one into action.

FHWA official Dave Smith (above) discusses issues with Lt. Dan Meyer, a Kansas state trooper, during the Peer Exchange meeting in Overland Park. At right, a breakout session facilitator posts a summary of discussion points.

The peer exchange sessions involved 125 people, including state highway and safety engineers, planners, and others from departments of transportation and other state agencies, and the safety research community.

All are involved in the "Lead States" program, which is designed to facilitate the development of plans and test drive strategies that can cost-effectively reduce highway deaths and injuries.

"I think everyone was pleasantly surprised by the size and breadth of the turnout," says AASHTO's Tony Kane. "The fact that 47 states were represented indicates that we are on the right track in our quest for safer highways."

The greatest value to participants was found in panel sessions and in six breakout groups, each comprising a small group of states whose representatives covered a wide range of discussion points during multiple sessions.

The first session was devoted to information sharing, with each state giving a brief overview of its CHSP activities. In subsequent breakouts states addressed their processes for developing a CHSP, successes and failures along the way with emphasis on identifying and resolving barriers and issues, and major attributes and components of a good CHSP (data driven, leadership, commitment, comprehensive and collaborative), and next steps.

Panel session included presentations on CHSP procedures and processes from the perspective of the FHWA, NHTSA, GHSA, and a State, and a review of the Integrated Safety Management Process by the iTrans consulting team.

In a second panel session speakers from Florida, Missouri, Kentucky, Minnesota and Maine discussed their experiences in Gaining upper management support, the processes they used to develop plans, lessons they have learned, and best practices they have employed and their outcomes.

In opening the peer exchange meeting, FHWA's George Ostensen reported that 16 states have fatalities higher than the national average, and that FHWA would reallocate and reprioritize internal resources to give them special assistance, including grants of $50,000 to assist with development of comprehensive plans.

Marlene Markison, representing NHTSA, urged the states to adopt data-driven strategic planning to determine their most critical problems, where they could achieve the greatest payoff per dollar invested, and to utilize resources of all agencies to achieve success.

Barbara Harsha of the Governors Highway Safety Association underscored the need for multiagency cooperation and eliminating "stovepiping" in planning and implementing highway safety programs.

"To make this work,"Harsha said, "we need to get out of our comfort zones and get familiar with all the programs and work of other agencies. That kind of broadening experience helps to develop understanding and appreciation for what others do."

Kane reminded the group that getting local governments involved, a key element of a comprehensive plan, is essential, considering that on average only 20 percent of the nation's roads are state owned.

The meeting was co-sponsored by AASHTO, the Governors Highway Safety Association, the National Cooperative Highway Research Program (Project 17-18), FHWA and NHTSA.

Saving Lives in Missouri

By Kevin Keith
Chief Engineer, Missouri DOT

In 2003, there were more than 180,000 traffic crashes and 1,232 deaths on Missouri roadways. It is absolutely unacceptable for so many people to die on our highways. That's why Missouri has a Blueprint for Safer Roadways and a goal of reducing fatalities to 1,000 or fewer by 2008.

The biggest causes of Missouri's crashes and the resulting injuries included exceeding posted speed limits or driving too fast for roadway conditions, driving impaired, and not wearing safety belts.

Although highway safety can be affected by driver decisions, such as not wearing a safety belt, talking on a cellular phone or speeding, it can also be affected by the efforts of federal, state, county and city governments, safety agencies, advocates and private groups.

In Missouri we understand we can't continue to do things the way we've always done them and expect to get the results we want. Clearly, we can't spend the same resources on the same strategies and expect a different outcome. And we know we can achieve the best results if everyone focuses on the same goal.

That's why in April 2001 we initiated a partnership to change the status quo and reduce the number of deaths and serious injuries that result from traffic crashes. The gathering of public and private safety agencies, organizations and groups, including MoDOT, formed Missouri's Coalition for Roadway Safety.

Three years of work and input from more than 150 of our safety partners led to the development of the Blueprint for Safer Roadways. We now focus on reducing fatalities and injuries, rather than solely on areas with high crash numbers. The Blueprint outlines eight strategies, derived from data analysis, that we believe are essential to reaching our goal:

- Pass a primary safety-belt law and maintain and enhance existing safety laws
- Increase enforcement on roadways with high numbers of crashes
- Increase public education and information on traffic-safety issues
- Expand rumble strip installation (strips warn motorists if they leave their lane of traffic)
- Expand, improve and maintain roadway visibility features (i.e. markings, signs, lighting, etc.)
- Expand median barrier installation to help divide opposing traffic lanes
- Increase enforcement and prosecution of alcohol and other drug-impaired drivers and pedestrians
- Improve roadway shoulders and other areas clear of objects so drivers have more recovery time

The Blueprint is filled with valuable information on crashes and how to prevent them. It will be a guide on how to put the strategies to work, whether they are statewide or regional in nature.

The strategies will be implemented through 10 regional coalitions that will analyze crash data and focus on problems in particular geographic areas. The regional coalitions bring all the highway safety groups into one focused effort by including representatives of the engineering, enforcement, education and emergency medical services areas, local policy makers and other safety advocates.

Their work has already begun, and as of December 1, 2004 Missouri's highway crash fatalities were down by 11 percent when compared to the same date in 2003.

Seat Belt Use 80% in 2004...

In 2004, safety belt use in the United States averaged 80 percent and ranged from 63.2% use in Mississippi to 95.3% in Arizona, NHTSA reported in November. These results are from probability-based observational surveys conducted in accordance with criteria established by NHTSA.

NHTSA also reported that the 2004 surveys also found the following:

- Seven States and Territories achieved use rates of 90% or higher: Arizona, Hawaii, Washington, Oregon, Michigan, California, and Puerto Rico.
- Arizona, Hawaii, Michigan, and Nevada exhibited the greatest improvement, each reducing belt nonuse by 30% or more during the period 2003 – 2004.
- Use rates in jurisdictions with stricter belt enforcement laws continued to exhibit generally higher use rates than those less able to enforce their laws.
- Tennessee strengthened its belt law to a "primary" enforcement law, effective July 2004. This State saw a jump in use from 68.5% in 2003 to 72.0% in 2004. The 2004 survey was largely conducted before the primary law took effect, so greater gains may be realized in 2005.

Next Wave of Guides for Attacking Persistent Highway Crash Challenges Now In Final Stages of Preparation

Within the next few months the NCHRP 17-18 panel will send to the printer four more guidance documents that contain strategies and countermeasures for developing and implementing statewide comprehensive plans to address specific crash-types identified in the AASHTO Strategic Highway Safety Plan.

State officials meeting in mid-November reviewed drafts and suggested refinements to two guides that are aimed at reducing deaths and injuries caused by motorcycle crashes and by drowsy and distracted drivers.

The review panels also focused on two other guides: for enhancing safety in highway work zones and improving the delivery of emergency medical services in rural areas.

Leanna Depue, head of the Missouri Safety Center and vice-chair of the panel that oversees Project 17-18, reminded the volunteer reviewers why their efforts were important.

"What you are doing is helping people do the right thing," she told the group of 40 reviewers and facilitators. DePue told the group, "We can't hope that deaths and injuries go down. Hope is not a strategy. We need to help people implement proven strategies."

The "lead states" effort that is now underway was designed to implement and test strategies that are found in the guides and to report and share results of state experiences with others.

To date 13 guides have been released, and one addressing alcohol-related crashes is expected to go to press in January.

Five more guides are scheduled to appear in 2006. They will deal with head-on crashes, bicyclist deaths and injuries, young drivers, speeding, and issues related to data collection and analysis.

Leanna Depue (far right) of the Missouri Safety Center reviews comments on next set of Implementation Guides.

Groups of state officials met to review final drafts of each of the documents.

Want More Information?

Detailed information about the AASHTO Strategic Highway Safety Plan and the 'Tools for Life' that have been created to facilitate its implementation is available via the Internet and in printed form at through the Transportation Research Board's bookroom.

For copies of the Plan, the implementation guides (NCHRP Repot 500) and the Integrated Safety Management Plan (NCHRP Report 501), go to

http://safety.transportation.org

For printed copies of the NCHRP Reports, make your request to:

Transportation Research Board
National Cooperative Highway Research Program
500 Fifth St., NW
Washing ton, DC 20001-2721
Telephone: 202-334-3213

New 'Tools of Life'

Guides addressing the following emphasis areas are available:

- Aggressive Driving
- Head-on Collisions
- Run off the Road
- Trees
- Unlicensed/Suspended/Revoked Drivers
- Unsignalized Intersections
- Horizontal Curves
- Utility Poles
- Older Drivers
- Pedestrians
- Seat Belt Use
- Signalized Intersections
- Heavy Trucks
- Integrated Safety Management Process

Guides to be published in 2005:

- Motorcyclists
- Work Zones
- Rural Emergency Management Services
- Distracted/Fatigued Drivers
- Alcohol

Scheduled for release in 2006:

- Head-On Crashes on Freeways
- Young Drivers
- Speeding
- Bicyclists
- Data Collection and Analysis

The High Cost of Highway "Unsafety"

By TOBY RICKMAN
Washington State Traffic Engineer

In Washington State, we can roughly estimate the yearly societal cost of the torrent of our highway crashes, and it comes to about $930 for every man, woman and child in the state.

Considering just those crashes that occur on the state highways (50,157 crashes of the total 127,869 reported state-wide), the societal cost calculation for 2002 was $2.45 billion. Extrapolating to the total for all highways and roadways, the annual societal cost of motor vehicle crashes for Washington is approximately $5.6 billion. These costs include medical costs, lost wages, property damage, lost productivity, and so forth.

Compare this to the estimated $1.5 to $2 billion cost of congestion to Washington in system delay imposed due to lost time of travelers, and higher vehicle operating costs from wasted fuel, increased oil use, and other effects of stop and go driving and you'll see that "unsafety" is two-to-three times more costly to our state.

If the societal cost of highway crashes is two or three times higher than the cost of congestion, shouldn't highway safety on your roadways get more attention? In Washington we are paying more attention.

We are now updating our Washington Transportation Plan that includes performance indicators and cost estimates to implement the strategies, and when it is completed in the Spring it will include an updated traffic safety strategic plan

That means that in Washington State all aspects of traffic safety will be considered for investment in the same planning forum that considers the cost of preserving the system and the cost of congestion.

There is other good news as well. The number of traffic fatalities in Washington State has been on the decline. In 2003, we recorded 601 highway deaths, a drop of nine percent from 2002 and the lowest number of fatalities since 1961.

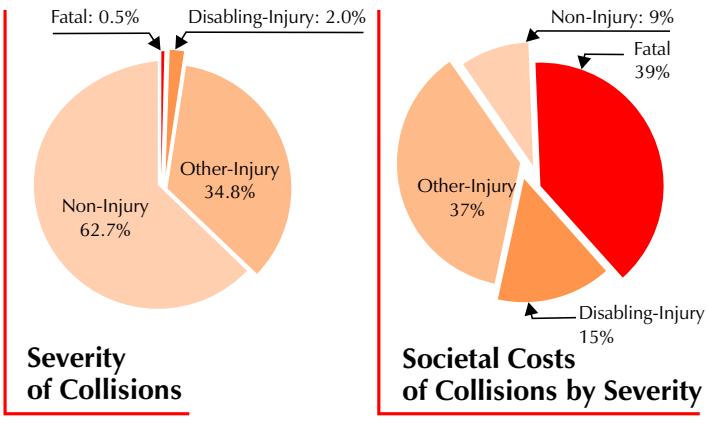
Disabling injury collisions also dropped in 2003 by 15 percent. 2,289 and total collisions dropped 3% in 2003 to 123,951.

The decrease in the number of fatalities and injuries is attributed to several factors, including the development and implementation in 2000 of a statewide highway safety strategic plan called Target Zero. The plan includes more than 75 traffic safety strategies that are making the difference. The plan is goal oriented, focusing on fatal and disabling injury crashes, which are responsible for 54 percent of societal costs.

The development of this plan included public and private traffic safety organizations and was lead by three major transportation agencies, the Washington Traffic Safety Commission, the Washington State Patrol, and the Washington State Department of Transportation. These and other agencies implement portions of the plan.

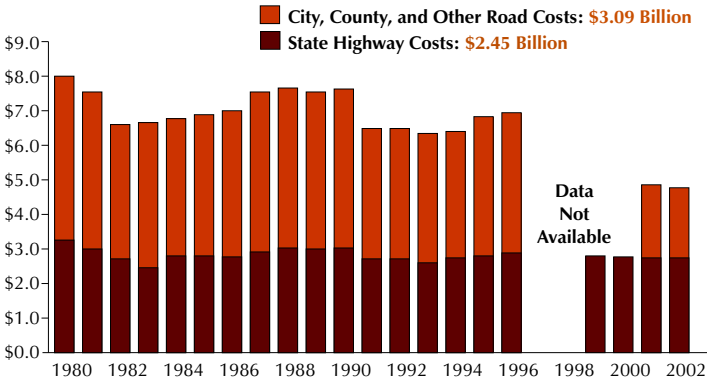
Severity of Collisions and Societal Costs of Collisions by Severity

All Washington Roads – 2002



Societal Costs of Motor Vehicle Collisions in Washington State 1980–2002

Cost in 2002 Dollars (In Billions)



New Website For Project 17-18

NCHRP Project 17-18 and AASHTO have collaborated to produce a new, updated website to support the national effort to use the "Tools for Life" created to "Drive Down Fatalities."

The new site provides better access to news and information, to NCHRP documents, a link to the Safety Portal dedicated to facilitating implementation of the AASHTO Strategic Highway Safety Plan, information about the "Lead State" program, and other useful information.

Go to safety.transportation.org and bookmark the site to make it easier to visit regularly.