

# LOCAL PROBLEMS REQUIRE LOCAL SOLUTIONS IN RURAL AREAS

## KENTUCKY AREA DEVELOPMENT DISTRICTS

### Objective

According to the U.S. Census, 21 percent of the U.S. population lives in rural areas, yet the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) reports that approximately 60 percent of all fatalities in the nation occur on rural roads. Solving this critical highway safety problem presents a challenge for states to develop solutions that address the unique needs of a rural environment. The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet met this objective by allowing local and regional input into the transportation planning process thereby ensuring resources are targeted at the areas of greatest need and that solutions have widespread support from those most affected.

### Approach

The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet works with regional transportation committees in 15 Area Development Districts (ADDs) to identify transportation projects and improvements in rural areas. These projects are given consideration when developing short- and long-range transportation plans. ADDs have been in existence for over 35 years. They ensure local government involvement in the decision-making process; create a flexible framework for policy development; encourage local, regional, and state partnerships; and maintain or establish a planning component at the regional level. The regional transportation committees include local elected officials, Transportation Cabinet representatives from the district level, state and local law enforcement, school officials, EMS personnel, safety organizations, businesses, commercial and trucking representatives, concerned citizens, and others as determined by each ADD. These committees play an important role in identifying, analyzing, and prioritizing transportation needs and goals in their respective regions.

Transportation planning is an important activity in the ADDs. In each ADD there is a full-time transportation planner whose duties include identification, prioritization, and evaluation of transportation needs, outreach to the public through the regional planning committee, a review of databases and statewide transportation documents, and assistance in the development of special studies or projects as requested by the Transportation Cabinet. Since 2001, the State has partnered with the ADDs to implement a rural highway safety program that targets resources through a comprehensive 4E approach – engineering, enforcement, education, and emergency response.

One of the rural highway safety projects underway in Kentucky is the Safety Circuit Rider Program (SCR). The Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP), housed at the University of Kentucky, is in the second year of this FHWA seed-funded pilot program. SCR provides training and technical support to local governments on ways to reduce roadway departure crashes that result in a collision with a fixed object, crashes at intersections, and pedestrian

**Figure 1. Mock Crash**



“Safety planning in Kentucky is from the grassroots level. The regional transportation committees, along with the highway safety committees in each of the State’s 15 Area Development Districts recommend solutions to be further investigated by the appropriate engineer on high-crash corridors and participate in planning safety events to focus on the educational aspect of highway safety.”

*Amy Kennedy, Programs Director, Buffalo Trace Area Development District*

“Through hazard elimination funds, we are able to provide a part-time person who devotes a portion of their time to highway safety. These highway safety liaisons primarily provide logistical support and also conduct activities and events such as law enforcement blitzes, checkpoints, and educational programs in the community and the schools.”

*Boyd Sigler, Traffic Safety Administrator, Kentucky Transportation Cabinet*

crashes on Kentucky’s rural two-lane local roads. Under this program, road safety audit teams examine a road and report on its crash potential and safety performance. Each participating county or city will then select a minimum of two low-cost safety improvement projects on local roads to implement with their own transportation funds and appoint three employees to participate in training sessions sponsored by LTAP.

The ADDs also are working with the Kentucky State Police on meeting standards that require cell phone emergency calls to be identified by location on a digital map at the dispatch center. This capability is critical to rural areas where it may be difficult for emergency responders and law enforcement to locate a motor vehicle crash.

In addition to the regional transportation committees, each ADD has established a highway safety committee that includes representatives from local, state, and Federal agencies and public and private sector entities, such as

schools, civic organizations, and businesses. The purpose of these committees is to provide a multijurisdictional approach to reducing fatalities and injuries. Figure 1 shows the approach involving law enforcement, fire, and EMS personnel in a mock crash staged at high schools to educate young people about highway safety.

One area where the ADD highway safety committees focus is the Drive Smart Corridors which are roads and highways identified by the Transportation Cabinet through data analysis and research as having a high rate of collisions, fatalities, and injuries. Thirteen have been identified in each of the Cabinet’s highway districts. Drive Smart is the branding name the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet uses on all highway safety related projects, events, and materials. It is up to the Drive Smart Corridor Safety Team to provide leadership in identifying strategic solutions for reducing fatalities and serious injuries along these corridors.

Several of the projects undertaken by the Drive Smart Corridor Safety Teams include an Operation Drive Smart Traffic Safety Blitz, which is a cooperative effort among all the law enforcement agencies along the corridor. The agencies work together to schedule the blitz, provide information to the public through the media, advertise along the corridor with radar trailers and variable message boards, and conduct patrols during the blitz period.

Other initiatives aimed at high school students include a Rollover Simulator, shown in Figure 2, that demonstrates with life-size dummies what happens to motor vehicle occupants in a crash when they are belted and unbelted, and Judgment Day mock trials which show young people what happens to a DUI offender in the courtroom using local attorneys, judges, other court officials, and a jury made up of other students.

Finally, the Transportation Cabinet also supplies ADDs with a “No-Zone” tractor trailer truck that is used to educate people on the area of these large vehicles where the truck driver is unable to see a passenger vehicle. A professional driver accompanies the truck to explain the dangers of “hanging out” in the truck’s No-Zone.

**Figure 2. Rollover Simulator**



“The regional approach has benefits in terms of funding. The transportation needs of the State far exceed our ability to fund them. The projects that are supported on a regional basis generally will have more impact in relation to the cost. Counties and municipalities that band together to support a project will likely have more success in moving those projects forward than those who fight among themselves for funding.”

*Daryl Greer, Director of the Division of Planning, Kentucky Transportation Cabinet*

*National Development Organization (NADO) Research Foundation Report, “Transportation Planning in Rural America,” December 2005*

## Resources

Cooperation among the regional committees, the state Transportation Cabinet, and the ADDs is maintained through bimonthly meetings with ADD transportation planners and the planning staff from highway district offices. In addition, the regional committees and the highway district office staff meet every two years to prioritize transportation projects in their areas by assigning a high, medium, or low designation. These entities also rank the top 10 priority projects in order of importance and by funding level. While local and regional priorities do not dictate final decisions, priorities and ranked projects are a key factor in the selection of projects for state transportation plans and programs.

The Transportation Cabinet's Department of Transportation Safety and the Division of Planning collaborate to oversee program delivery which includes funding for a part-time highway safety liaison in the ADD, establishment of the highway safety committee, development of an ADD scope of work, and programs or projects that will improve safety along the State's Drive Smart Corridors.

## Outcomes

The Kentucky ADD model implements transportation safety improvements on both state high-crash corridors through the Drive Smart program and on local roads through the SCR initiative. Both of these approaches are showing some promise.

According to a report from the Kentucky Transportation Center at the University of Kentucky, "Analysis of Traffic Crash Data in Kentucky 2001-2005," the fatal crash rate in the State showed a slight increase (5.5 percent) compared to the previous four-year average. The injury crash rate, however, decreased by 12.2 percent in 2005 compared to the previous four-year average and in 2004 was the lowest during the five years.

For high-crash local roads where improvements have been made through the SCR program, there has been a 30.4 percent reduction in crashes in the first year. As the program continues, Kentucky expects this downward trend to continue.

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*Best practices are being identified and documented by the Transportation Safety Planning Working Group (TSPWG). For more information go to [tsp.trb.org](http://tsp.trb.org) or [www.fbwa.dot.gov/planning/SCP](http://www.fbwa.dot.gov/planning/SCP).*

