

The State of Transportation Safety

Travel and Highway Deaths on the Increase in 2005

Reports from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) indicate more travel and higher fatality rates on the nation's highways in 2005.

Highway Travel At An All-Time High

Highway Statistics 2005, released by FHWA, showed that Americans drove nearly three trillion miles on the nation's roads and highways last year, a 27.4 billion-mile increase over travel in 2004 and nearly 25 percent greater than 1995. In addition, between 2004 and 2005, both the resident population and the number of drivers increased by three million. These figures impact both traffic congestion and safety particularly because the increased number of drivers and vehicles miles of travel increase exposure. A copy of *Highway Statistics* is available at www.fhwa.dot.gov/policy/hs05/pdf/nt1.pdf.

In addition to general highway statistics, FHWA also released a list of locations exhibiting the greatest safety needs for each state. SAFETEA-LU requires that these top five percent reports be made available to the public along with each state's recommendations regarding possible remedies, costs, and obstacles to implementation.



Since each state uses a different method to determine their most hazardous safety locations, the reports cannot be compared. The statutory prohibition on using any of the information as discovery or evidence in tort liability actions is clearly stated on the web site. (See related story, page four). The five percent reports are available at <http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/fivepercent/index.htm>.

Motorcycle/Pedestrian Fatalities Result in Increased Overall Fatalities

According to NHTSA, 2005 saw a sharp rise in the number of motorcycle and pedestrian fatalities, resulting in a 1.4 percent increase in the total number of motor vehicle fatalities nationwide. This number corresponds to a fatality rate of 1.47 per 100 million vehicle miles traveled.

During 2005, a total of 43,443 people lost their lives and another 2.7 million were injured. Motorcycle fatalities rose 13 percent to 4,553, with almost half of these riders not wearing helmets. Pedestrian fatalities increased from 4,675 in 2004 to 4,881 in 2005.

In addition to disclosing the alarming fatality trends related to motorcycles and pedestrians, the early edition of the agency's *Traffic Safety Facts 2005* includes important information for transportation planners as they identify their safety priorities. Consider the following facts:

- Fatalities were up in 26 states and the District of Columbia with increases ranging from less than one percent to as much as 23 percent.

- There were more than six million police-reported motor vehicle crashes.
- Fifty-eight percent of fatal crashes involved only one vehicle, compared with 31 percent of injury crashes involving only one vehicle.
- More than half of fatal crashes occurred on roads with posted speed limits of 55 mph or more.
- Thirty-nine percent of fatal crashes involved alcohol; down from 60 percent in 1982.

A copy of the report is available at <http://www.nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/pdf/nrd-30/ncsa/ppt/2006/810639.pdf>.

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Terecia Wilson: A Dedicated Innovator



Foresight, innovation, and a passion for improving safety characterize the TSPWG newsletter Champions. That is certainly the case with Terecia Wilson, Director of Safety for the South Carolina Department of Transportation.

Terecia officially joined the highway safety community in 1984 when she was hired as a senior planner in the Governor's Highway Safety Office. "It wasn't until I found an old trunk in my house that I realized my career in highway safety started much sooner," she said. In high school, she chaired the student government's Highway Safety Committee which promoted safe driving among students through assemblies and information.

In 1987, she joined the SC Department of Highways and Public Transportation as Assistant Director of the Safety Office. During her tenure with the Safety Office, she secured the grant funding used to create one of the most recognized and longest running highway safety programs in the country – "Highways or Dieways." The program, which started in 1988 and ran through 1994, received numerous marketing and public relations awards, including national awards from the Public Relations Society of America and NHTSA as well as an international film making award.

"This was a research-based campaign," Wilson noted. "We looked at the data to determine the contributing causes of crashes and then conducted focus groups to find out what would motivate people to change their attitude and behavior."

In her present position with the South Carolina Office of Safety, she oversees the planning and implementation of highway safety programs for the State as well as occupational safety within DOT. She also provides technical assistance and testimony as requested by members of the State Legislature when considering stronger highway safety laws. Since 1999, the State has adopted a number of these laws, including a per se law for impaired driving and a primary safety belt law.

In addition to success in the legislative arena, Wilson has been an innovator in creating programs targeting transportation problem areas throughout the State. She secured support from SCDOT's State Highway Engineer and the FHWA Division Administrator to establish SCDOT's Road Safety Audit Program, the procedures of which are currently featured in a TRB synthesis. (A copy of the synthesis is available at http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/nchrp/nchrp_syn_336.pdf).

She developed comprehensive operational procedures for CRISOS (Crash Reduction By Improving Safety on Secondaries), a program that uses data to identify high-crash secondary roads. "We put together multi-disciplinary teams to determine the extent of the problem," Wilson said.

"The teams conducted audits of the targeted roads and made recommendations for a variety of low-cost, short-term safety improvements." She also worked with Clemson University to develop a unique K-12 traffic safety curriculum that has been successfully tested with thousands of students in the State. Clemson is continuing to train teachers in the delivery of the curriculum.

This push toward improvement is a hallmark of Terecia Wilson's career. In 2003 the death rate per VMT dropped to the lowest level in the State's history. "The greatest strides in highway safety," she said, "come in learning from each other and gaining knowledge from the success of others." She also attributes the improvements in transportation safety to the efforts of a "superb staff" and the dedication and involvement of safety partners. "[The achievements] would not have happened without team work. We have come together to make a difference, and I am privileged to be a part of it."

Best Practices Spotlight

The 5E Approach to Work Zone Safety

When the South Carolina Department of Transportation decided to complete 27 years of road construction in seven years while facing increases in licensed drivers, registered vehicles, and annual vehicle miles of travel (VMT), it became apparent a new approach was needed to deal with the safety hazards caused by increased construction and traffic.

The solution was a 5E initiative involving engineering, enforcement, emergency medical services (EMS), and economic development strategies. In the education area, the Department conducted a public information campaign that focused on the need to reduce speed and pay attention in and around work zones along with media spots and billboards featuring work zone employees' children.

To create an environment that met motorists' expectations and promoted safety, the Department also conducted training so that work zones in the State looked and felt consistent, accompanied by operational reviews to ensure compliance. A High Visibility Work Zone Enforcement Initiative, involving state and local law enforcement, was created to underscore zero tolerance for speeding in work zones, and the Department worked closely with South Carolina Public Information, Education, and Relations in

EMS (SC PIER) to help promote work zone safety. Finally, the Department showed how improvements in work zone safety could positively impact economic development.

Even though work zone construction nearly quadrupled from 1999 through 2005, work zone crashes decreased 21.5 percent. Public education efforts also resulted in 73 percent of the public reporting support for increased fines. For more information on this program, visit the TSPWG web site at <http://tsp.trb.org> and click on "Best Practices."



South Carolina Department of Transportation engineers worked with enforcement personnel to identify potential problems and develop solutions prior to implementation of the High Visibility Work Zone Enforcement Initiative.

The TRB Annual Meeting

The Transportation Research Board's Annual Meeting will bring over 10,000 transportation professionals from around the world to Washington, D.C., January 21-25, 2007 at the Marriott Wardman Park, Omni Shoreham, and Hilton Washington Hotels. Following is a short list of some of the meetings of interest to transportation safety planners. To learn more, visit the TRB web site. The annual meeting has an interactive feature that allows a search by topic.

Committee Meetings

Monday, January 22, 2007

Transportation Safety Planning

Subcommittee (Formerly *Safety Conscious Planning Subcommittee*)

Marriott Wardman Park – Harding Room
10:15 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Agenda items include the latest developments in transportation safety planning (research developments, the status of SAFETEA-LU implementation, safety in metropolitan and statewide planning rule, transportation safety priorities for 2007, safety desk reference for planners, new Highway Safety Manual and Planning, transportation safety planning training course, communications, outreach, and updates from members).

Safety Data, Analysis, and Evaluation Committee

Marriott Wardman Park – Washington B3
7:30 p.m.-9:30 p.m.

Tuesday, January 23, 2007

Native American Transportation Issues Committee

Hilton Washington Hotel – Bancroft Room
8:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Highway Safety Workforce Development Task Force

Marriott Wardman Park – Washington B5
1:30 p.m.-5:30 p.m.

Tribal Safety Issues Subcommittee

Hilton Washington Hotel – Bancroft Room
3:45 p.m.-5:30 p.m.

Wednesday, January 24, 2007

Transportation Safety Management Committee

Marriott Wardman Park – Washington B1
2:30 p.m.-6:00 p.m.

Panels

Monday, January 23, 2007

Safety Management and Asset Management

Hilton Washington Hotel – Lincoln East Room
8:00 a.m.-9:45 a.m.

SAFETEA-LU requires the development of state Strategic Highway Safety Plans, which include safety analysis for all public roads. There is clearly a need for better coordination and integration of data and decision-making from various asset management systems within states. This session explores approaches to integrating safety management and asset management and reports on discussions at a recent peer exchange focusing on data integration.

Improving Highway Safety Through Better Crash Data Systems

Hilton Washington Hotel – Lincoln East Room
10:15 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Each state currently collects, captures, maintains, and analyzes traffic accident data to improve safety through highway engineering, law enforcement, emergency medical services, and driver education. SAFETEA-LU includes resources for making investments in individual state systems and creating a national data repository to improve the richness of available data and raise the utility of safety investments. This session looks at where we are in building better data systems, grants available for these initiatives, the elements of successful awards, and state needs. Participants will discuss progress made the past year and future safety data system needs.

Tuesday, January 23, 2007

Native American Transportation Issues

Hilton Washington Hotel – Lincoln East Room
1:30 p.m.-3:15 p.m.

This workshop will focus on tribal transportation law and provide some innovative approaches for transportation planning coordination among states, MPOs, and tribes.

Guidelines and Training for Road Safety Audits

A Road Safety Audit (RSA) is a formal safety performance examination of an existing or future road or intersection by an independent, multidisciplinary team. This team visits the site, reviews road elements that present safety concerns, and identifies opportunities for eliminating or mitigating the safety problems. RSAs are being used in Michigan by SEMCOG, in Vermont by several Regional Planning Commissions, and in New Jersey by the South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization.

To assist planning organizations, public agencies, and Tribal Governments, FHWA is providing technical assistance in the form of newly published guidelines and training workshops. The Road Safety Audit (RSA) Guidelines are designed to help planning organizations and public agencies develop effective RSA policies and procedures. The guidelines are available at <http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/rsa/rsaguidelines/html/index.htm>.

The use of road safety audits also is promoted through training workshops demonstrating how RSAs can help reduce injuries and fatalities. The workshops help local agencies understand basic RSA concepts and gain experience in conducting the program. Workshop participants also learn how low-cost safety improvements, identified through the RSA process, can be implemented quickly to reduce fatalities and serious injuries. The course is available at no cost. For scheduling, please contact Eloisa Raynault at Eloisa.Raynault@dot.gov. For general RSA information, contact Louisa Ward at Louisa.Ward@dot.gov.



Members of a Road Safety Audit team from the South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization (SJTPO) examine a local road for potential safety problems.

Safety Information at Your Fingertips

The web is a wonderful tool, except for those times when you either can't find what you need or you spend hours searching through web site after web site to find information. In this day and age where google is a verb, it would seem an easy task to find out what other states are doing in the field of transportation. Unfortunately, each state has its own way of designing web sites and it can be difficult to quickly find specific items.

Michel Wendt, the Reference Librarian from the Washington State DOT, was similarly frustrated and decided to do something about it. The result is a search engine that can search all state DOT web sites at once. Using the site is easy, just input the topic, and find a direct link to the information that is posted. The web site is located at <http://www.google.com/coop/cse?cx=006511338351663161139%3Acnk1qdc0dc>.



Roundabouts A Viable Solution in MN

How do you improve a hazardous intersection (two fatalities and 50 injury crashes over five years) where county and state roads, both with speed limits of 55 mph, come together and not cause traffic to back up? In Minnesota, the answer was to construct a roundabout. Roundabouts allow simultaneous free traffic flow from all legs while improving safety by reducing conflict points and eliminating high-speed right angle crashes. When the intersection was opened in September 2005, it was able to handle approximately 700 vehicles during a rush-hour period with 90 percent of the approaching traffic not having to yield before entering the roundabout. Even more important, over a 12-month period, crashes were reduced to one.



This high-speed roundabout at State Highway 13 and County Road 2 in Scott County, MN reduced the number of crashes to one. That crash involved a motorcycle that entered the roundabout at high speed and ran off the road.

Data Sharing and Liability

As states move ahead on fulfilling requirements of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), many are grappling with how to share data on hazardous locations while not opening themselves up to potential legal liability. A recent NCHRP research project identifies some of the liability risks associated with sharing safety data along with strategies for overcoming this impediment.

The research project, “Identification of Liability-Related Impediments to Sharing Section 409 Safety Data Among Transportation Agencies and a Synthesis of Best Practices” (Research Results Digest 306, www.trb.org), was prompted by the fact that despite the provisions of 23 U.S.C. §409 which indicate data cannot be used as evidence against a state in litigation or discovery, a provision that was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court, a number of states continue to withhold or restrict the sharing of data. Successfully implementing safety improvements and integrating safety into the transportation planning process requires that crash data be made available to local communities, MPOs, and other traditional and nontraditional safety partners. In addition, SAFETEA-LU requires that states describe no less than five percent of locations determined to exhibit the most severe safety needs along with a description of potential remedies.

To meet this requirement as well as to improve overall safety, many states that share data manage the risk by carefully tracking the released information, requiring users to indicate they will not use the information for litigation purposes, the use of watermarks and stamps, and by providing the information in read-only format.

Other strategies for managing risk include the use of interagency agreements that include a description of the §409 protection; training for data users on how to protect the data and why such protection is necessary; providing data in formats that are suitable for the requester's needs, and deciding that the benefits of openly sharing data outweigh the liability risk. If the latter course is taken by the state, the processes and procedures used to identify hazardous locations should be documented and provided to the court along with an explanation of how the state uses the information in their transportation planning process.

While §409 is helpful, the report indicates that further clarification is needed, particularly for data that are not used to meet the Section 148 requirement of SAFETEA-LU, and recommends that a national repository for state highway tort claims be established to serve as a tool for states to share information. A copy of the full research report is available at <http://tsp.trb.org>.

EU Links Safety Info

The European Union, through their SafetyNet project, has created the European Road Safety Observatory (ERSO) web site designed to help policy-makers, researchers, politicians, and road safety professionals find the information they need on safety throughout the EU.

With just a few mouse clicks, an individual can find information on issues such as alcohol, speed, and novice drivers; the number of motor vehicle fatalities in Europe; how to use, interpret, and analyze traffic safety data; and an overview of European traffic safety organizations, projects, and authorities. The web site is located at www.erso.eu.

Planning Calendar

January 21-25, 2007

TRB 86th Annual Meeting
Washington, D.C.
Marriott Wardman Park, Omni Shoreham,
Hilton Washington
For more info: <http://tsp.trb.org>

January 26-30, 2007

American Traffic Safety Services Association
Convention and Traffic Expo
San Antonio, TX
For more info: www.atssa.com

February 4-6, 2007

NARC Washington Policy Conference
Washington, D.C.
Omni Shoreham Hotel
For more info: www.narc.org

February 8-10, 2007

AMPO New Partners for Smart Growth
Los Angeles, CA
The Westin Bonaventure Hotel and Suites
For more info: www.ampo.org

February 26-27, 2008

Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP)
Peer-to-Peer Exchange
San Diego, CA
Marriott San Diego Mission Valley
For more info: Contact Adrienne Blackwell,
NCHRP, ablackwell@nas.edu

February 28, 2007

National Safety Engineers Peer Exchange
San Diego, CA
Marriott San Diego Mission Valley
For more info: Contact Tom Welch, Iowa
DOT, Tom.Welch@dot.iowa.gov

March 12-14, 2007

NADO 2007 Washington Policy Conference
Crystal City, VA
Crystal Gateway Marriott
For more info: www.nado.org

March 25-27, 2007

Lifesavers
Chicago, IL
Hilton Chicago
For more info: www.lifesaversconference.org

March 25-28, 2007

ITE 2007 Technical Conference and Exhibit
San Diego, CA
Sheraton San Diego Hotel
For more info: www.ite.org

April 14-18, 2007

American Planning Association National
Planning Conference
Philadelphia, PA
For more info: www.planning.org

April 22-26, 2007

NACE 2007
Milwaukee, WI
Hyatt Regency Milwaukee
For more info: www.naco.org

April 29-May 2, 2007

AASHTO
Standing Committee on Highway Traffic
Safety (SCOHTS)
Branson, MO
For more info:
www.transportation.org/?siteid=35

June 4-6, 2007

ITS America's 2007 Annual Meeting and
Exposition
Palm Springs, CA
Palm Springs Convention Center
For more info:
www.itsa.org/annualmeeting.html

June 23-26, 2007

NARC 41st Annual Conference and
Exhibition
Orlando, FL
Rosen Shingle Creek Resort and Golf Club
For more info: www.narc.org

July 22-26, 2007

2007 Traffic Records Forum
St. Louis, MO
Millennium Hotel
For more info: www.astip.org

August 26-30, 2007

An International Conference on Forensic
Toxicology: Alcohol, Drugs and Traffic
Safety and Ignition Interlock Symposium
Seattle, WA
Seattle Sheraton
For more info: www.T2007.org; questions
to T2008@wsp.wa.gov

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AAA

American Association of Motor Vehicle
Administrators

American Association of State Highway and
Transportation Officials

American Planning Association

American Public Transportation Association

American Public Works Association

Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations

Community Transportation Association of America

Federal Highway Administration

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration

Federal Transit Administration

Governors Highway Safety Association

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International Association of Chiefs of Police

Mid-America Regional Council

Missouri Department of Transportation

National Association of County Engineers

National Association of Development Organizations

National Association of Regional Councils

National Cooperative Highway Research Program

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Society for the Advancement of Violence and
Injury Research (SAVIR)

Transportation Research Board