

VISION SAFE DRIVE - 2007

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Rural Transportation Safety and Security Center
Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute, North Dakota State University*

CENTRAL THEMES FROM PARTICIPANTS

- ☪ Need for shared goals and stakeholder engagement in traffic safety in all disciplines and at all levels, especially local level
- ☪ Innovate, borrow from others, engage other disciplines, etc. - *if you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always gotten...*
- ☪ Crash location is often random while crash type is predictable
- ☪ Move safety beyond safety advocates, 'culturalize' it

INTRODUCTION

A successful regional event focusing on rural traffic safety was held November 29-30, 2007, in Bismarck, ND. The conference was organized by the Rural Transportation Safety and Security Center as a part of its mission to promote and enhance the region's transportation safety and security through research, education, and outreach in a partnership with stakeholders. The program was put together in cooperation with the state departments of transportation from Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming, along with the Federal Highway Administration's North Dakota Division Office. Participants learned about peer experiences and innovative practices in traffic safety from around and outside the region. An audience of enforcement, engineering, and education professionals with state and local perspectives discussed several topics around the central conference theme of traffic safety initiatives for the region.

Tony Kane of the American Association of State Transportation Officials set a backdrop for conference attendees with an overview of endemic behavioral and engineering traffic issues, including alcohol, speeding, and road departure. He also proposed a shared goal to cut U.S. highway deaths in half by the year 2030. Currently more than 40,000 people die each year in traffic crashes.

Jeff Lindley, FHWA Associate Administrator for Safety, then offered a federal perspective on SAFETEA-LU activities and implementation. He also outlined issues that are likely to be addressed in the upcoming reauthorization. These policy initiatives form the public foundation for traffic safety pursuits. He pointed out that the states' Strategic Highway Safety Plans, a source of topics selected in this conference, are currently being implemented. As those plans move forward, Lindley noted states will need to address some critical issues to assure the plans are reassessed periodically and sustainable into the future. Those issues include: engaging stakeholders, addressing data needs, planning resource allocation strategies/assessments, and developing senior leadership support.

The large truck aspect of the traffic safety plans was highlighted by Jeff Jensen of the Federal Motor Carrier Administration's North Dakota Division. He noted the prominence of driver-related factors in commercial vehicle crashes in North Dakota is at 41 percent compared to 28 percent for the nation.

COORDINATION AND COOPERATION

The need for shared goals and stakeholder engagement in traffic safety at all levels was a central theme in the introductory remarks and audience discussion.

An entry survey of conference participants suggests that although federal, state, and local groups actively communicate and work together, more work needs to be done to integrate efforts between state agencies and in the relationship between state agencies and local organizations **Error! Reference source not found.**

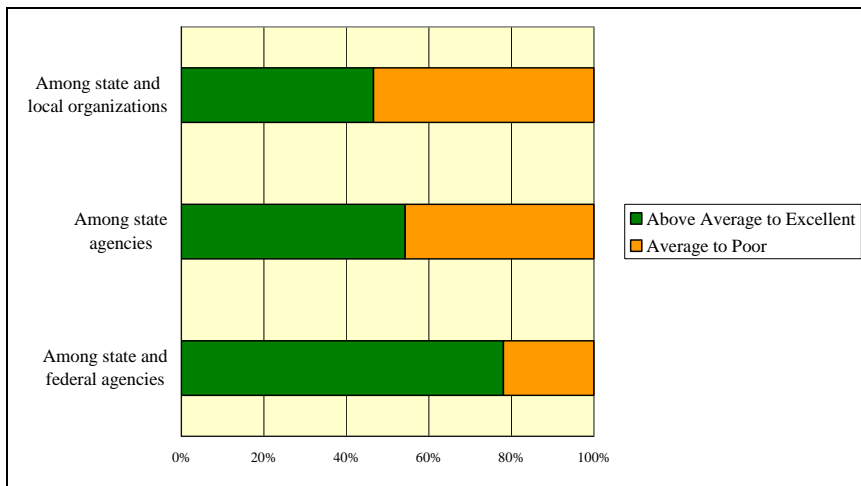


Figure 1. Rating of Coordination and Cooperation on Transportation Safety Issues Among Stakeholders

Participants were also asked to identify top priorities and key organizations to engage in traffic safety initiatives. Priorities included many of the themes addressed by conference speakers and panels Seatbelt use, impaired driving, road departures, young drivers, and older drivers were most commonly listed among the top traffic safety issues. Other topics listed included distracted driving, funding, tribal areas, signage and markings, animal crashes, data, local initiatives/successes, and large trucks. In addition to Federal Highway Administration and state DOTs, several other groups commonly named as key organizations in traffic safety were law enforcement, local government and community groups, driver education, private businesses, judicial colleagues, tribal government, medical field/public health, the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration, and political leaders.

While several of these groups did participate in panel discussions, **a strong message was shared that this conference and RTSSC activities should promote**

interdisciplinary discussions and idea-sharing as a contribution to regional traffic safety.

CAN WE MAKE DRIVING SAFER IN OUR REGION?

Yes! Drawing on the State Highway Safety Plans for the four states and suggestions from traffic safety experts, the event was used to highlight impaired driving, younger and older drivers, and low-cost road safety features. Conference attendees were impressed with the innovative programs offered by speakers from within the region and other areas of the nation.

The only man who makes no mistakes is the man who never does anything.
-Theodore Roosevelt

It was suggested that a component in the next conference is to follow-up on the new programs presented as well as identify interim adopters to discuss experiences. As Mike Rothschild reminded us **'if you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always gotten'** (Anthony Robbins). Learning is not all in the successes and best-practices but in sharing the trial-and-error along the way. Rothschild shared his experiences with the Road Crew program. The program uses social marketing to motivate and enable drivers to make the decision not to drive after drinking by offering attractive community-based alternatives.

David Moreana, FHWA, and David Huff, Montana DOT, offered issue-based strategies for engineering best-practices for older drivers and graduated drivers licenses (GDL) for younger drivers, respectively. Simple practices such as introducing large lettering and improving reflective characteristics and color contrast can be very beneficial for older drivers who may face diminished vision, reduced physical mobility, and slowed cognitive processes. The GDL generally offers young drivers an opportunity to gain needed decision-making skills over time in a more controlled driving environment.

A second speaker panel discussed strategies for coordinating traffic safety initiatives at the DOTs in Montana and Missouri. Montana DOT Director Jim Lynch showed examples of how Montana has used its Comprehensive Safety Plan to create a **multiagency and multijurisdictional approach to traffic issues** that cover the 4Es. Community forums, corridor-based programs, and policy coalitions are examples of activities initiated from its Comprehensive Safety Plan traffic safety platform. The Missouri approach is also holistic strategy in its 4Es approach to traffic safety issues. Brian Chandler with MODOT offered a systematic approach to safety initiative – reiterating that **for most crashes the location is random but the type is predictable**. Missouri DOT developed an Essential Eight as a focus for establishing protocol, allocating resources, and pursuing policy in their traffic safety platform. Speaker biographies and individual presentations are available in conference proceedings at the Vision Safe Drive website <http://www.ugpti.org/rtssc/conference/visionsafedrive2007/>

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM OTHER PRACTITIONERS?

Afternoon tracks concentrated on behavioral and engineering aspects of road safety.

Focus topics such as impaired driving, younger and older drivers, roadway safety audits, and low-cost safety improvements created a platform for sharing ideas and experiences with new and well-established traffic safety programs.

Wyoming presented information on its program for ignition interlock devices. North Dakota offered information on the sobriety checkpoints and saturation patrols that it uses in addressing impaired driving. South Dakota discussed its successes with the statewide 24/7 Sobriety Program and the STOP Program developed by the Rapid City Police Department.

The potential for ITS applications in the region's road safety and tribal road safety audit practices were presented by North Dakota. South Dakota showed how road safety audits are valuable to safety decision-making there. Wyoming offered their HR3 initiative as an example of success in interagency cooperation. Several other programs were also discussed during the sessions.

The strength of presentations is evident in the ratings given by the conference attendees. Speaker recommendations from the state DOT and FHWA partners provided a great mix of perspectives and ideas. The comments from individual sessions will be considered along with exit and plenary session comments for topics for future research and outreach presentations.. The session ratings were:

Table 1. Session Ratings in Participant Evaluation Survey

Session Topic	Average Rating	Share of Ratings Above Average
Keynote: Highway Safety Vision for the Future	4.1	80%
Panel: Federal Insights for Rural Traffic Safety	3.7	62%
Panel: Can We Make Rural Driving Safer	4.2	87%
Panel: How Can Coordination Enhance Traffic Safety	4.3	87%
Keynote: Impaired Driving and Social Marketing	4.6	94%
Track 1: Can We Influence Rural Drivers' Behavior		
<i>Impaired Driving</i>	4.2	88%
<i>Younger and Older Drivers</i>	3.8	65%
<i>Other Driver-Based Traffic Safety Initiatives</i>	4.0	73%
Track 2: How Can We Provide Safer Roadways		
<i>Road Design and Operations</i>	3.9	68%
<i>Roadways Safety Improvements</i>	4.0	72%
<i>Interagency Cooperation for HR3 Initiatives</i>	4.0	76%
Panel: Other Rural Traffic Safety Initiatives	4.0	70%

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The final session in the event was a plenary exercise. Several strong themes emerged from this discussion that support the development this regional, interdisciplinary conference. Those themes included limited resources, many demands, and the need for collaborative efforts. Participants were asked about their vision for traffic safety in the year 2018 – Toward Zero Traffic Deaths was most common among the ideas.

The priorities and ideas offered for reaching this goal included individual and cultural behavior initiatives, along with road and vehicle engineering suggestions. Many of the ideas identified for improving traffic safety were addressed in this conference. They included impaired and distracted driving, seatbelt use, low-cost road safety investments, and innovative enforcement and education programs. An important element in the dialogue was the potential for cooperative traffic safety efforts that may be beneficial to the region as well as individual states.

Exit comments and discussion during the plenary session supported the idea that a future conference and continued discussion would be an asset to traffic safety stakeholders in the region.

Participant Visions for 2018

- Zero traffic crash deaths.
- Traffic fatalities, especially alcohol/drug related, reduced across the board in all states and reservations,.
- Reduced property damage crashes.
- Changed social attitudes.
- ND with a primary seat belt law.
- Sustaining safe driving norms; and a safer driving culture with mature drivers.
- Robust traffic patrol and roads built and maintained on reservations.
- Computer chips in roadways.
- Safety as part of freight planning.
- Funding mechanism to get dollars into local government hands with fewer restrictions.
- Mandatory driver education and simulation opportunities.
- Local governments as part of safety initiatives.
- Vehicles with anti-run-off-the-road devices – improved technology.

Soapbox or Priority Issues for Individuals

1) Partnerships/Lawmakers/Legislative Support/Funding

- Community support of program with state and community leadership.
- Resource coordination among federal, state, and local.
- Improved flexibility in use of federal funds for programs.
- Engage local and state policymakers on an ongoing basis.

2) Data Support/Analysis

- Data improvements in quality, accuracy, availability, and applications.
- Safety management system for local government, including crash reports, road condition inventory, and sign/stripe inventory.
- Effective use of intelligent transportation systems in safety.
- Multidisciplinary team to assess roadway design before and after project.

3) Tribal Issues

- Research-based Native American programs.
- State-wide coalitions and ongoing communication with all entities.
- Resources for addressing enforcement needs on reservations.

4) Roadway Safety/Engineering

- New rumble stripes ideas (C and edge line), bigger sign fonts, advance intersection warning – improved sign design, etc.
- Importance of paved shoulders.

5) Education/Training

- Market examples with sound with business/marketing principles that can be applied to traffic safety issues.
- Need to develop, support and showcase success stories.
- Media efforts toward speeding and DUI, including multi-state campaign.
- Strengthen education for new and currently licensed drivers
- Simulation training/education for drivers.

Future Research and Conferences

1) Partnerships/Lawmakers/Legislative Support/Funding

- Working with county/city municipalities (partners); collaborative efforts at the local/community level.
- Increased funding and flexibility in spending.

2) Data Support/Analysis

- Information on what and should be done with existing data.
- Multidisciplinary decision applications to data.

3) Tribal Issues

- Develop partnerships and goals with tribal and local stakeholders.
- Work with tribes to increase safety (reduce fatalities/injuries) both on and off the reservation.
- Cultural sensitivity/online training for cultural awareness with Native Americans.

4) Roadway Safety/Engineering

- Roadway design decision support for safety features such as rumble stripes versus strips, rural left or right turn lanes, and ditch slope.
- Bring ideas on low-cost safety measures to be used on a system-wide basis or perhaps a corridor.
- Urban intersections safety design features, deterring red-light running, and technological advances in roadway safety and improvements.
- The use of technology in traffic control such as traffic cameras and sensors.

5) Education/Training

- Focus on one problem and come up with a comprehensive plan to involve public, educators, all law enforcement, and courts.
- Examine “behavioral” issues for potential to try innovative programs developed through multidisciplinary work.
- Marketing strategies/safe driving practices to target populations.

6) Specific Problem Areas

- Seatbelt use promotion and creative ideas for primary seatbelt legislation.
- Impaired driving to include drinking, drugs, prescription and OTC drugs.
- Crash prevention among our youth.
- Address motor vehicle crashes with animals.

7) Topics/Suggestions for Future Conferences

- Continue with theme of 4 E’s, with mixture of roadway and behavior safety.
- Workshops for “hands on” learning opportunities.
- Rotate conference with other states.
- Invite legislators, governors, and stakeholders who can implement changes in the law plus a youth group to be present such as SADD.
- Include vendors in future conferences.
- Regional Native American traffic safety issues workshop/peer exchange. Key issues: data collection/quality/availability; cultural issues/countermeasures related to impaired driving and seat belt use; funding issues related to accessing funds; enforcement issues related to cooperation and collaboration.
- Session Topic Ideas: Nation-wide trends in safety enforcement; low cost safety improvements; ITS in rural environments, future technology; Corridor crash rate analysis; How to streamline use of funding for improving safety – local roads; The Wyoming high risk rural road program pilot; More info on Road Crew and STOP program; One of the Montana tribes who could share how the traffic/highway safety programs have impacted their tribe and follow-up on efforts underway in South Dakota.

Contact us and access conference presentations at:

<http://www.ugpti.org/rtssc/conference/visionsafedrive2007/>