

Plan updates statewide safety priorities

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ZERO IN WISCONSIN remains the goal behind a comprehensive framework for reducing traffic fatalities, injuries and crashes. Updated every three years since its release in 2001, the Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP) identifies specific areas that are the source for the majority of serious or fatal crashes and describes actions state or local highway and law enforcement agencies can take to lower the numbers. Targets for change have included intersection design and operation, head-on and roadway-departure crashes, and work zone safety. The next version of the SHSP is due out March 2014. It will fine-tune all priorities and implementation steps based on recent feedback from safety professionals and advocates across Wisconsin who participated in a statewide survey and a daylong peer exchange event.

Resetting priorities

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation's Traffic Safety

Council (TSC), a group that represents expertise in engineering, enforcement, emergency medical services and education, developed the latest draft of the SHSP. In that draft, they describe traffic crashes as avoidable events caused by one or more factors, most often human behavior, road or environment, and vehicle issues.

WisDOT's Scott Janowiak knows the SHSP well from his work with local governments who must include measures outlined in the plan to support their applications for safety-focused road improvement funds from the federally funded Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP).

"The baseline goals and key factors of the updated SHSP are much the same, but the findings from outreach the TSC did uncovered some good reasons to shift priorities in the direction of issues like driver alertness," Janowiak explains. The changes smooth out discrepancies and keep the plan relevant, he says. "It's a primary document that supports multiple initiatives and provides guidance to several other WisDOT highway safety plans and programs."

Research component

Traffic Safety Engineer Andrea Bill, with the Traffic Operations and Safety (TOPS) Laboratory at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, represents the research side of the data-driven plan. Bill leads the TOPS group that designed and hosted the survey for the TSC. She says a statistically significant number of responses gave them a good and current idea of existing problems and solutions, and information on which groups are in a position to take action on changes that prevent highway crashes.



"This is invaluable data that, along with the work done at the peer exchange session, will help all the safety partners focus resources where they belong."

The TSC tabulated material from the survey, peer-exchange interactions and input from other sources to narrow a list of 22 safety-related issues to those most important to Wisconsin's highway safety challenge and the state's ability to influence conditions that will produce positive change in the issue area. The result was a list of ten top priorities that, in some cases, combined two related areas into one.

Better intersection design and operation are on the list (at left) along with behavioral issues like lowering instances of aggressive and impaired driving.

The SHSP will present key performance measures and background for each priority and an action plan that outlines steps for achieving change. Issues that did not make the top ten, like designing safer work zones and reducing vehicle-train crashes, remain targets for improvement but at a "continuing" rather than priority level. In some cases, these issues moved off the priority list due to measurable improvements over the past three-year cycle.



The SHSP Top Ten

- 1 Reduce driver distraction; improve driver alertness
- 2 Reduce alcohol and drug-impaired driving
- 3 Reduce motorcycle crashes
- 4 Ensure drivers from teen to older are licensed and competent
- 5 Improve bicycle and pedestrian safety
- 6 Improve design and operation of intersections
- 7 Increase seat belt use; improve child safety seat use
- 8 Curb aggressive driving; reduce speed-related crashes
- 9 Prevent or mitigate lane-departure crashes; reduce head-on and cross-median crashes
- 10 Improve traffic incident management and safe travel in bad weather

SHSP as guidance

Local governments have a stake in making Wisconsin roadways safer. Among statistics cited in the SHSP is the fact that roads and streets under local jurisdiction accounted for 57 percent of all crashes in 2009. Becoming familiar with the priorities, action steps and use of data in the SHSP helps local road officials align their road safety efforts with others statewide. Janowiak explains it also gives them important guidance when applying for federal funds through HSIP.

"Intersection safety improvements and changes that reduce run-off-the-road crashes are some of the main project types funded through HSIP and those trace straight back to the SHSP," he says. "We ask agencies to reference it as supporting evidence for their applications, attaching their plans to the action plans described in the SHSP."

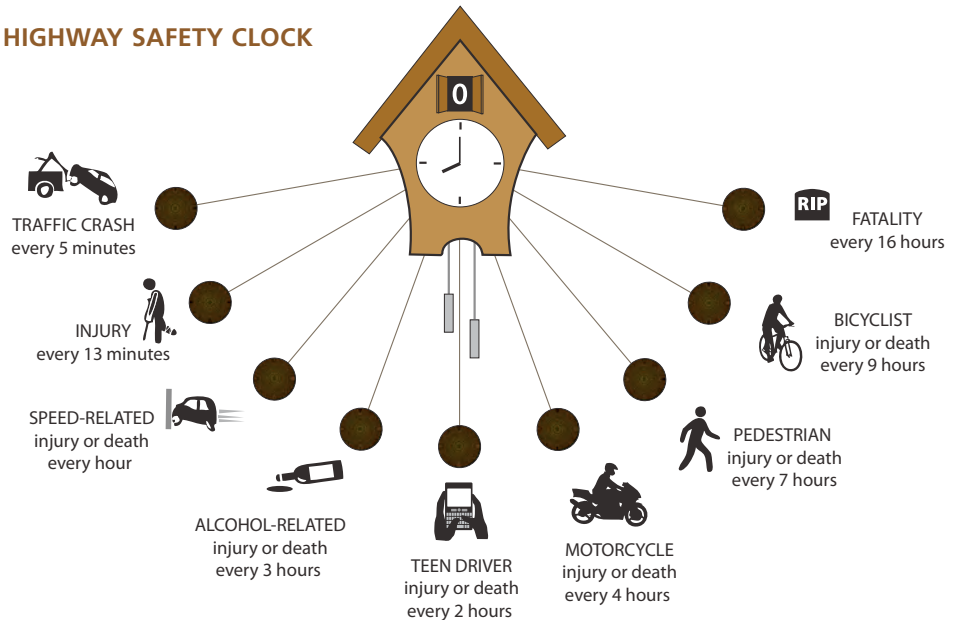
Janowiak considers the emphasis on making decisions based on facts an important message of the SHSP. Recommendations for achieving change in each priority area depend on analysis of quality data, some of which local governments contribute through their use of WisTransPortal where they review and update their local crash data.

Role of SHSP

Randy Romanski, Section Chief with the WisDOT Bureau of Transportation Safety (BOTS), Wisconsin State Patrol, notes the importance of cross-agency cooperation in the evolution of the SHSP. He says BOTS Director David Pabst chairs the TSC group and sees that sense of collaboration as a way to reinforce the impact of the SHSP as a working document.

The focus BOTS puts on changing behavior through education and enforcement complements the weight state and local highway engineers give to safety-related infrastructure improvements recommended in the SHSP. BOTS uses highway safety data to extract roadway crashes by severity. It

HIGHWAY SAFETY CLOCK



The Crossroads HIGHWAY SAFETY CLOCK graphically portrays the gap between the goal of ZERO deaths in Wisconsin and current crash statistics from WisDOT. As the clock ticks, it depicts crash incidents by type and frequency.

shows, for example, that there is a traffic crash on Wisconsin roads every five minutes and a fatality—from speed, alcohol, distracted driving or other causes—every 16 hours.

Like other public agencies in the state that rely on the SHSP to develop and implement their individual highway safety plans, BOTS uses the SHSP as a "safety playbook" when formulating its annual plan for improving highway safety in Wisconsin.

Leadership and input

Besides creating a focused set of top priorities for the three-year plan, Romanski says the peer exchange process helped identify leaders who can interact with WisDOT, BOTS and other divisions of state government on the issues related to highway safety and contribute to ongoing discussions on the SHSP.

The TSC is organizing work groups to review and further refine actions related to each of the ten priority issues. Local road officials can provide input to those work groups, through their County Traffic Safety Commission or WisDOT regional safety engineers.

Closer to zero

Wisconsin claims a better highway safety record than most states: fatality rates here are below the national average and have been for decades. Those involved in the recent review of the SHSP say the willingness of public agencies at all levels to collaborate on how to keep improving on that record indicates that along with experts in the private sector, community organizations and concerned citizens, they see opportunities to move closer to zero in Wisconsin.

The updated plan, with its well-researched priorities and practical solutions, provides local governments and others who have a stake in highway safety guidance for including SHSP implementation steps in their projects. ■

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Resource

<http://www.zeroinwisconsin.gov/index.html>

WisDOT consumer source for information about the Zero in Wisconsin campaign has links to traffic safety facts and resources.