

Make roadways safer

CRASH STATISTICS and the experience of many local governments suggest preventive efforts can make local roads safer.

Wisconsin saw nearly 118,000 crashes on its streets and highways in 2006. Fifty-nine percent of those crashes occurred on roads maintained by Wisconsin local governments. There were 659 crashes that resulted in 712 fatalities. Half of these occurred on county, city, village and town roads. Rural roads accounted for more than 76 percent of the fatalities—a deadly distinction.

Driver error or impairment get the blame for many crashes and rightly so. Individuals driving under the influence, going too fast, being inattentive or using bad judgment are serious problems. But while careless drivers con-

tribute greatly to the statistics, every vehicle crash involves a chain of events. Roadway characteristics often are a factor in that chain.

Local officials who build, maintain and operate local road systems have a responsibility to identify safety deficiencies and take action to correct those deficiencies.

Low-cost measures make a difference

Common sense is one of the most important line items in county or municipal budgets. Many local governments report a significant reduction in the number of crashes on their roads after making sensible, low-cost safety improvements—in some cases, reducing crashes by one third.

Improvements include changes that alert motorists or give better

guidance on sections of road that are difficult to negotiate at night, in the rain or at highway speeds. Routine maintenance of pavements, shoulders and rights-of-way help keep roads in safe driving condition. Proper signage and appropriate and visible pavement markings also make travel safer.

The four scenarios outlined here present typical roadside hazards and the low-cost ideas for correcting them.

1— Obstructed STOP sign

Traffic signs are useless if motorists cannot see them in time to react. The most crash-critical example is the STOP sign. Be sure all STOP signs are visible and recognizable from a distance that allows drivers time to react.



Warning sign prepares motorists to stop safely at hidden intersections.

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Plan for road ratings and workshops

TRACKING PAVEMENT

conditions is critical to managing Wisconsin's local road system. The biennial pavement rating process comes up again in 2009. It requires local officials responsible for local roads to rate them and submit results to WisDOT before December 15, 2009. Local governments will receive a packet of information from WisDOT in May that outlines the pavement rating process and important submission dates.

The road ratings process is one aspect of the long-term view local officials need to take in evaluating the overall condition of the roadway system they manage. What trends do they see in system performance? Is it getting better, staying the same or deteriorating?

Along with timely pavement inspection and required data collection, the ratings program offers local officials a chance to consider alternative maintenance strategies, update their three-

five-year plans, or consider a much-needed improvement project. As fuel and material prices stress county and municipal budgets, exploring cost-effective maintenance strategies can help extend useful pavement life.

Ratings workshops return

The Transportation Information Center (TIC), in partnership with WisDOT, offers its *Using PASER and WISLR to Manage Your Roads* workshop program again in 2009. The workshop addresses all aspects of the inspection, ratings and submission process. Participants learn the basics of pavement management, and how to read and use ratings to develop effective road maintenance policies and programs.

Presenters cover how to use the PASER pavement evaluation and WISLR database tools successfully. This includes making the most of WISLR's mapping (GIS) tools.

TIC will run eight identical PASER/WISLR workshop sessions around the state in March and

early April. See *Calendar* on page 12 for details of time and location.

Susie Forde, Chief of Data Management for WisDOT and a workshop leader, says she and Kelly Schieldt, Statewide Local Roads Coordinator, plan to expand their presentation this year to include the use of mapping features in WISLR. "We want to get local officials familiar with what WISLR can do to help them streamline their records and better analyze the condition of their pavements," Forde explains.

Hands-on training

Feedback from 2007 workshops indicated local officials want more hands-on training in using WISLR and PASER—something that goes beyond the regular workshops. Forde and TIC Director Steve Pudloski say plans for 2009 include piloting two hands-on training sessions in May to test this concept. Look for updates on these sessions in mailings and on the TIC website. ■

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