Thirteen County Road Safety Audit Reviews: Lessons Learned

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ABSTRACT

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) completed a Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan (CHSP) in 2004 that identified the critical safety strategies that, if implemented, were most likely to reduce fatal and life changing injury crashes in order to help meet the adopted safety goal of getting below 500 fatal crashes in 2008. In addition, one of the key conclusions of the CHSP was that, for Minnesota to be successful at meeting the goal, additional safety investment was needed on local roads, where over 40% of fatalities occur, and in particular along county state aid highways, which have a 30% higher fatality rate than similar two-lane rural state highways.

These items taken together resulted in Mn/DOT directing highway safety dollars specifically towards counties and with the highest priority given to projects that involved implementation of projects from the list of the state’s critical strategies. One of the projects funded in the first year of this program consisted of conducting road safety audit reviews (RSARs) of approximately 130 intersections in the 13 counties in the north-central part of the state that together comprise Mn/DOT’s District 3.

The RSARs were completed by a team of seasoned safety veterans from CH2M Hill, Mn/DOT, the Federal Highway Administration, and the Local Technical Assistance Program Center at the University of Minnesota. It was originally expected that the results of the field reviews would primarily apply to the specific counties and intersections that were the subject of the review. However, during the conduct of the reviews it became apparent that the lessons learned from these field reviews, while still of value at the specific intersections, could in fact have widespread application along both the state and county system of highways. Some of the key observations include the following:

- Intersection sight distance restrictions were widespread.
- Mn/DOT’s recommended guide sign layout often contributed to the sight restrictions.
- County highways were in generally good shape, but pavement markings were in only fair to poor condition.
- There was virtually no enforcement presence on the county system.

During the RASR process, two other important items were documented. First, from a risk management perspective, counties should consider adopting written maintenance policies, especially as it relates to pavement marking and sign maintenance. Finally, counties should consider developing standalone safety improvement programs.

Key words: Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan—Minnesota—safety audit