Overview of the Strategic Highway Safety Planning Process

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ABSTRACT

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has adopted a new national safety goal: reducing the fatal crash rate by 33% to 1.0 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel. In addition, the FHWA has requested each state to prepare a Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP) that identifies how they will contribute to this effort by documenting the following items:

- The state’s vision and goal for reducing the number of traffic related fatal and life changing injuries
- The key safety strategies that, when implemented, would be most effective at achieving the adopted goal
- An analysis of safety investments in order to confirm that achieving the goal is, in fact, feasible in a reasonable period of time.

CH2M Hill was selected to help four states (Minnesota, Nevada, Nebraska, and Mississippi) prepare their SHSPs, and even though the states are geographically diverse with a wide range of crash characteristics, the key conclusions of a data-driven analytical process are strikingly similar. First, each state has selected a “stretch goal,” and the analysis indicates that the adopted safety goals can be achieved. However, the biggest challenge for each state appears to be institutional inertia. The analysis of alternative safety investment scenarios suggests that the only way to meet the safety goal involves changing how the safety program is delivered; it needs to be more comprehensive (all four safety “E’s”), more systematic (all roads), more focused on a very short list of strategies linked to fatal crash causation factors, and more proactive. These characteristics do not describe how the safety program is currently being delivered in any of the states.

One final point also needs to be noted: the challenge dealing with the state legislatures. The data driven analysis clearly identified that safety investments should include a focus on seat belts, impaired drivers, young drivers, speed, and red light running enforcement. However, the legislatures (with very few exceptions) have repeatedly declined the opportunity to positively address these issues; fewer than one-half of the states have a primary seat belt law, states are hindered in their response to impaired driving, only a handful of states have a comprehensive graduated drivers license program, and only a few states (mostly on the coasts) allow automated enforcement.

The lessons learned from these very different states are consistent, support the guidance from the FHWA, and can be used at every level to adjust how safety projects are delivered in order to support the efforts to reduce the massive burden on citizens associated with traffic deaths and injuries.

Key words: safety—Strategic Highway Safety Plan