



CENTER FOR TRANSPORTATION SAFETY

at the Texas Transportation Institute

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Fatality Rates Fall, Enthusiasm for Improvements Increases

Traffic safety experts across the country are applauding the latest report that shows a drop in the nation's fatalities. The preliminary report, released in October by the U.S. Department of Transportation, shows a 7 percent decrease in the number of people who died in the first half of 2009.

"This is great news," says Quinn Brackett, a senior research scientist with the Center for Transportation Safety (CTS). "But, we still have to remember that more than 16,000 people were killed during the first half of 2009 from car crashes. And that's what continues to motivate us."

In fact, the enabling legislation that created CTS eight years ago states: "Although significant progress has been made over the past two decades in reducing fatalities per vehicle mile traveled, the absolute number of fatalities has remained at an unacceptable level." Brackett says the same sentiment applies today.

In part, Senate Bill 586 charged CTS with:

- studying complex policy issues and providing input as to how roadway safety affects such issues and affects roadway transportation for sustainable development;
- establishing programs and partnerships with public or private entities to develop and implement new policies, technology, strategies, relationships and sources of funding; and
- transferring knowledge and technology to industry, state and local governments, and the public.

CTS researchers are now evaluating new information about crashes in Texas since the Crash Record Information System (CRIS) has been updated to include data through 2008. "This database system will be a wealth of information for the Center," says Director John Mounce. "We will be able to identify significant crash issues, suggest and develop crash reduction countermeasures, and evaluate their effectiveness." Mounce says the crash information should also help evaluate the impact of changes in public policy with regard to traffic safety and measure changes in the driving culture.

So far, the crash data have revealed three major issues: the state has a higher than average fatality rate because of intoxicated drivers, driver distraction is a growing problem, and motorcycle deaths are skyrocketing.

Furthermore, crashes are increasing at intersections (nearly 40,000 serious injuries per year), in construction zones and at railroad crossings.

"Over the last eight years, CTS has been fortunate to be involved with our other agency partners in highway safety efforts that have had a real impact on saving lives," Mounce says. "Even so, the facts are clear: there is plenty left to do."



CTS Begins Focus on Law Enforcement Safety Issues

The Center for Transportation Safety (CTS) is staying on the right side of the law — hiring two new members for its Crash Analysis Group who have a combined 40 years of law enforcement experience. What was the reason for adding these staff members?

“First responders — including police, firefighters and paramedics — have always been on the front line, working to protect all of us,” says Director John Mounce. “Having Troy Walden and Bob Gilbert on our team gives us an inside track on understanding the transportation safety needs of law enforcement.”



From left to right: Bob Gilbert and Troy Walden have a combined 40 years of law enforcement experience.

Most recently it was Gilbert who joined the Crash Analysis Group at CTS. His 30-year career with the Department of Public Safety (DPS) fits in with Mounce’s vision of creating a law enforcement initiative program. Gilbert, who held the rank of trooper, sergeant and lieutenant before retiring earlier this year, is firmly on board.

“It’s imperative that CTS develop a working relationship with the people who are always on the road facing transportation safety issues every day,” Gilbert says. “I think my

former colleagues at DPS will have plenty to tell us. As I see it, my job is to gather that information so we can focus our efforts on helping make their jobs as safe as possible.”

Gilbert, who dreamed of being a lawman since he was a kid, views his new job with CTS as a continuation of his childhood passion. “I hope to be in continuous contact with law enforcement agencies of all sizes to get the big picture of the obstacles they may face.”

The other former police officer at CTS is Assistant Research Scientist Troy Walden, who spent 11 years with the City of College

Station Police Department in various divisions. He was in traffic patrol, criminal investigation and accident reconstruction.

So far at CTS, Walden has worked on the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Strategic Highway Plan, conducted cost-benefit analysis for various projects and provided red-light camera

analysis for TxDOT. He is also working with the Brazos Valley Impaired Driving Working Group, which is made up of transportation leaders concerned with issues surrounding the dangers of drinking and driving.

Like Gilbert, Walden sees the benefit of having a close relationship with law enforcement. “There are numerous traffic safety issues that are specific to first responders,” Walden says. “It just makes great sense to protect those who protect us.”



New Study to Communicate Transportation Reliability

Getting from here to there in the future may not be any less congested, but experts think you may have a lot more access to information to guide you around obstacles. In fact, the technology already exists to make your trip — either by private car or public transit — faster and safer.

Getting that information to you is the subject of a \$1 million research project awarded to the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) and co-managed by Center for Transportation Safety (CTS) Human Factors Program Manager Susan Chrysler.



“People instinctively know that there’s variability in trip time, that it takes 15 to 25 minutes to get from point A to B, but they don’t really have the words to describe that range and volatility,” says Chrysler, who is a co-principal investigator on the project with Beverly Kuhn, head of TTI’s System Management Division.

“People moving to a congested city could access information about travel time reliability along certain routes that might help them decide, for example, which neighborhood to live in. At some point, I believe all types of information will be easily accessible and will greatly help people make transportation and other decisions,” Chrysler predicts. “In part, our goal for this project is to evaluate what is considered useful information and how to communicate that information to the public.”

The two-year research project, entitled “Effectiveness of Different Approaches to Disseminating Traveler Information on Travel Time Reliability,” is part of the second phase of the Strategic Highway Research Program — funded by the last congressional highway transportation bill and administered by the Transportation Research Board.

One element of the extensive research project includes a field test in Houston. Motorists will fill out trip diaries and will be monitored with a GPS device. Researchers will evaluate their transportation activities during a period when they have access to information about travel time reliability through a prototype information system to be developed by the research team.

Twenty-seven TTI and CTS staff members will be working on the research project, requiring nearly 6,000 staff hours over the next two years.

***People instinctively know that there’s variability in trip time, that it takes 15 to 25 minutes to get from point A to B, but they don’t really have the words to describe that range and volatility.
– Sue Chrysler***



The Night and Day Difference: A Look at Safety Belt Use

A new Center for Transportation Safety report shows that nighttime drivers and passengers in Texas wear their safety belts as much as 6.3 percentage points less often than their daytime-driving counterparts.

The report, *Nighttime Safety Belt Use Survey Results in Ten Texas Cities*, was produced by Center researchers who conducted surveys in Arlington, Austin, Corpus Christi, Dallas, El Paso, Ft. Worth, Garland, Houston, Lubbock and San Antonio in April, May and June of 2009.

Senior Research Scientist and Manager of the Behavioral Research Group Katie Womack said, "For years, we have been conducting surveys during daylight hours across the state. The latest results show a 92 percent daytime use rate. But, it has become increasingly apparent from crash data that belt use at night may differ from daytime use. Fewer people involved in crashes at night wear safety belts. We want to know if that holds true for the non-crash-involved nighttime occupants."



Research Associates Christie Madsen and Mike Guidry survey an intersection in Dallas as part of the 2009 nighttime survey of safety belt use.

This is not the first time the Behavioral Research Group has conducted a nighttime safety belt use survey. In 2008

a smaller survey was done in Dallas, Ft. Worth, El Paso and San Antonio. Results of the survey indicated lower safety belt use at night than at the same locations during the day.

Due to these results, the nighttime survey was expanded to include the six other cities that are also the focus of daytime survey evaluation during the Click It or Ticket enforcement period.

Two surveyors were sent to each location where lighting allowed the right conditions to collect data. Due to the difficulty of being able to see in cars, especially when it is dark outside, one surveyor watched the traffic and called out observations to the other surveyor, who recorded the data.

According to Womack the purpose of the project was threefold: 1) to compare safety belt use at night to safety belt use during the day, 2) to see the impact of the Click It or Ticket campaign on nighttime use, and 3) to collect general characteristics of safety belt users and non-users.

The results of the 2009 nighttime surveys varied from city to city, but in general:

- there was a lower usage rate for nighttime drivers and passengers than during the day,
- females were more likely than males to wear their safety belt,
- usage rate increased with age (seniors were most likely to wear safety belt), and
- drivers and passengers in cars were more likely to wear their safety belt than pickup truck drivers and passengers.

School Bus Safety Week and the CTS Connection

"Avoid Harm. Obey the Stop Arm." That's the theme of National School Bus Safety Week, which is Oct. 19-23. The theme refers to the moveable red stop sign extending from the side of a school bus, warning motorists to stop because children are getting on or off the bus and may be crossing the street.

The goal is to raise awareness about school bus stop laws and the consequences of breaking the law. In Texas, motorists must stop for a school bus with flashing warning signals and an extended stop arm. They must remain stopped until the bus starts moving, the bus driver signals, or the flashing lights are turned off.



Sadly, too many drivers ignore the law. A Center for Transportation Safety (CTS) study estimated that 2.96 million vehicles illegally pass stopped school buses in a typical school year. That's almost 17,000 illegal passes every day in Texas.

Throughout the week, many Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) troopers and other law enforcement officers will ride on buses and issue citations to drivers who illegally pass when the bus stops to load and unload students. Drivers face fines of up to \$1,000 if convicted of violating the law and can be charged with a state jail felony if convicted a second time.

"Whether a driver intentionally ignores the law or simply is unsure about when to stop, the result is the same," explains Associate Research Scientist Patricia Turner in the Behavioral Research Group. "Children are put at risk of injury or even death."

To raise motorists' awareness of the law and the penalties for disobeying it, CTS developed posters and brochures promoting the message, "Stop! Flashing Red, Kids Ahead." The Center also produced a tip card for school bus drivers to help keep students safe in the danger zones around the bus, where they are at greatest risk of being injured.

"The two most important areas of emphasis for these materials were educating the public about when to stop and what the consequences would be if they don't," states Texas Department of Transportation Project Director Sam Sinclair. "The materials are an excellent way to educate the public because they address these concerns and the serious nature of violations."



Planning for 2010 Traffic Safety Conference Underway

Preparation is underway for the 2010 Traffic Safety Conference to be held in Dallas next spring. The statewide event is the second safety conference organized by the Center for Transportation Safety (CTS).

The inaugural event was held in Houston last November, bringing together safety professionals, policymakers and practitioners...who all had the same motivation. "We achieved our primary goal of bringing together various constituencies devoted to reducing fatalities on our roadways," says Center Director John Mounce. "Everyone at the conference was, in some way, a problem solver. We are optimistic we can continue that success with the next conference."

The theme for the 2010 Traffic Safety Conference, "Putting the Pieces Together," highlights the need to coordinate the resources and contributions from a wide spectrum of safety professionals and disciplines.

"It's long been recognized that people from various groups concerned with safety, including educators, advocates, researchers, law enforcement, medical professionals and policymakers, don't often get together even though they are concerned about many of the same issues," says CTS Research Scientist Val Pezoldt, who is helping to organize the conference. "The 2010 Traffic Safety Conference is designed to provide a forum that emphasizes the perspectives of all these groups who will share information to help with the common goal of improving traffic safety."

Some of the issues to be addressed at the conference include distracted driving, impaired driving, safety infrastructure, bicycle and pedestrian concerns, safety in work zones, enforcement technologies, motorcycle safety, and improving the traffic safety culture.

To register or contact conference planners, go to http://tti.tamu.edu/conferences/traffic_safety10/.



Welcome Aboard!

Brian Cox joined the Center for Transportation Safety (CTS), as part of their Behavioral Research Group, in August. His primary responsibility is organizing field observation surveys of occupant restraint throughout Texas and managing the data collected on this surveys.

Cox graduated in 2006 with a B.S. in psychology from the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, Va. He is originally from Charlottesville, Va., and moved to Texas from Philadelphia, Penn.

Cox can be reached at (979) 845-0913 or b-cox@ttimail.tamu.edu.



Brian Cox

Srinivas Reddy Geedipally joined CTS in September as an engineering research associate, in the Crashworthy Structures Program. His primary responsibilities are conducting fundamental research in highway safety, crash analysis and statistical modeling. He will also assist in the evaluations of issues related to highway safety and crash prevention.

Geedipally holds a B.E. (2002) in civil engineering from Osmania University in India, M.Sc. (2005) in traffic environment and safety management from Linkopings University in Sweden, and Ph.D. (2008) in civil engineering from Texas A&M University. Prior to joining CTS, Geedipally was an engineering research associate with the Texas Transportation Institute's Crashworthy Structures Program. He is originally from Hyderabad, India.

Geedipally can be reached at (979) 862-1651 or srinivas-g@ttimail.tamu.edu.



Srinivas Reddy Geedipally

Robert (Bob) Gilbert joined the Crash Analysis Group in June. His focus is on law enforcement initiatives and coordinating research efforts within the law enforcement community. He retired in April after 30 years with the Texas Highway Patrol as a lieutenant stationed in Houston.

Gilbert can be reached at (979)862-8753 or rgilbert@tamu.edu.



Bob Gilbert

Marcelina (Marcie) Perez joined the Planning and Evaluation Group in August. She attended Texas A&M and holds a B.S. in structural analysis and design from the University of Houston, Downtown.

Over the past 12 years Perez was employed by a small business in Houston where she received invaluable project management skills.

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Marcie Perez



Center for Transportation Safety staff