



## Virginia Strategic Highway Safety Plan

# Road Show Meetings Summary September 2011

The Virginia Department of Transportation and its partners from the Departments of Motor Vehicles (DMV), Education, and Health, and the Virginia State Police (VSP) conducted a statewide road show to obtain input from safety stakeholders on an update of the Commonwealth's Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP). Meetings were held in the following areas:

Northern Virginia	September 7, VDOT District Offices, Fairfax
Richmond	September 8, Richmond Police Training Academy
Charlottesville	September 14, Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission
Roanoke/Salem	September 16, VDOT District Offices, Salem
Hampton Roads	September 23, Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization

Nearly 130 safety stakeholders attended the five events and offered their views and opinions on the traffic safety issues in Virginia and ways to solve those problems. The two and a half hour meetings involved presentations by VDOT, DMV, and VSP, followed by a facilitated discussion. Following is a summary of what occurred during these meetings.

### **SUGGESTED STRATEGIES/ACTION STEPS**

Following is a listing of the strategies and action steps by emphasis area that were recommended at the Road Show meetings. To avoid duplication similar strategies were combined and where needed, a strategy was added to items that were action steps. The added information appears in italics.

#### **Roadway Departure Emphasis Area**

- Develop a systemic approach to implementing safety improvements, i.e., widening of shoulders, rumble strips, banking, etc.
  - Conduct a systemic review of roadway departure crashes by functional classification and location.
  - Make systemic improvements on shoulder areas that are similar.
  - Include safety projects when doing resurfacing.
  - Review results of safety project on Route 220 to improve geometrics and determine whether it is applicable to other areas.
  - Implement corridor based improvements, i.e., curve signs, guardrails, geometric, delineation, etc.
  
- Analyze relationship of the roadway and the users, i.e., shoulders, curves, operational and geometric improvements.
  - Examine signage, lighting, delineation.
  - Review road design in rural areas to determine necessary changes.
  - Install rumble strips and striping (good on newer roads; not so good on older roads).
  - Reduce visual clutter (too many signs on roadways).
  - Conduct multi-disciplinary road safety audits (RSA).
  - Ensure a forgiving environment exists once someone leaves the roadway.

- Review use of Fresnel lens for commercial drivers which reduces blind-spot and prevent sideswipe crashes (case study: England)( <http://www.truckview.net/>).
- Improve visibility and sight distance through various maintenance and operations improvements.
  - Cut the grass.
  - Work with VDOT representatives to develop ways to overcome delays in maintenance.
- Improve access management programs in the urban areas to reduce the number of access points.
- Pass a law for tougher fines and penalties for distracted driving.
- Review safety in and around work zones to determine the need for any improvements.
  - Improve coordination in work zone areas and make sure to communicate locations and times for the work zones to local communities and law enforcement in a timely manner.
  - Provide public education and media blitzes when closing the interstate for construction or maintenance activities.
  - Expand information reported via the pothole number.
- Develop a quick clearance law or policy to facilitate a quick clearance of wreckage from the roadway.

### **Speeding Emphasis Area**

- Review roadway design and geometry to determine whether it contributes to speeding.
  - Review Complete Streets and Context Sensitive Design programs to identify potential strategies.
  - Review the National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) human factors design guide.
- Develop support for proven countermeasures that can change the safety culture and result in greater acceptance of speed limits, i.e., automated speed enforcement, red light running. *Also a strategy in the Intersection Emphasis Area.*
  - Review the military’s program for reducing speeding including a program conducted by the Marine Corps that focuses on motorcycle riders.
- Identify and implement effective speed management programs
  - Determine the number of crashes at various posted speed limits.
  - Re-evaluate the fines and points structure for speeding.
  - Determine a definition for speeding, i.e., 10 miles over the posted speed limit.
  - Determine if roadways are properly signed re: speed limits.
  - Obtain local data on the number of people who exceed a safe speed.
  - Expand the message of red light cameras.
  - Target right angle crashes.
  - Focus on yellow lights not just red signal timing
  - Work with local vehicle dealers and urge them not to promote how fast cars can go in their sales pitches.

### **Intersections Emphasis Area**

- Examine intersection design to ensure safety for all users including pedestrians and bicyclists.
  - Examine right of way issues (e.g., yield vs. stop laws and compliance).
  - Determine whether the yellow interval should reflect actual speeds.

- Conduct a thorough review of pedestrian and bicycle crashes to determine contributing factors and causes.
- Ensure VDOT policy to consider roundabouts at each intersection upgrade is widely known by regional and local transportation agencies and organizations.
- *Develop intersection safety awareness campaign.*
  - Stress the need to stop for pedestrians who are in the crosswalk.
  - Include information on right turn on red light, rolling stops, and red light running.
  - Educate the judicial community about their role in improving safety for pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Develop support for proven countermeasures that can change the safety culture and result in greater acceptance of speed limits, i.e., automated speed enforcement, red light running. *Also a strategy in the Speeding Emphasis Area.*

### **Young Drivers Emphasis Area**

- Review driver’s education program and determine areas for improvement.
  - Revisit licensing protocols; consider an annual renewal process for young drivers or a requirement to take another road test before getting full license.
  - Ensure SOL requirements include a road safety message, material, and math/science.
  - Provide information in driver’s education curriculum on work zones, distracted driving, seat belt use, etc.
  - Review and strengthen the driving test.
- Develop and implement strategic and effective educational messages for youth.
  - Target education efforts when the young driver receives their license; provide information on rules of the road and the risks associated with driving (use real world examples).
  - Reinforce “driving is a privilege not a right.”
  - Provide information on driving problems associated with medications for ADHD, asthma, etc.
  - Provide education on rail grade crossings.
  - Reassess how competency behind the wheel is measured.
  - Provide positive reinforcement, i.e., social norming
  - Put together a young driver focus group and ask them for input into the program.
  - Develop a Teen Pledge program where young people pledge not to text (WAVY has a “Wait to Text” program)
  - Develop approaches to get parents involved in young driver safety, i.e., licensing ceremony and provide information to them on distracted driving.
  - Use social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, videos, simulators) to reach out to young drivers, i.e., provide free apps; establish social media sites regionally and feature local crashes.
  - Identify ways to get into colleges and universities (currently working with Old Dominion University).
- Develop a program for young drivers age 21 and older.
- Provide education to judges on young driver issues and how judges impact the traffic safety education process.
  - Review judicial licensing ceremonies and determine how to improve, i.e., consistency.
  - Involve judiciary as an integral part of driver education process.

- Conduct traffic education programs early on to reinforce good traffic safety habits (kids as young as four years are perceptive of simple safety rules); ensure parents are involved.
  - Determine whether medical examiner’s Child Review Team, which examines all fatalities involving children age 0 to 17, has useful information.
  - Provide information on walking and bicycling in the school curriculum (may be in the Middle School).
  - Review results from YOVASO middle school pilot in Franklin County.

### **Unrestrained Occupants Emphasis Area**

- Pass a primary seat belt law.
  - Educate legislators on the high number unrestrained fatalities and severe injuries in the region and state.

### **Alcohol-Related Emphasis Area**

- *Provide education on the problem of alcohol-related crashes.*
  - Ensure judges understand the need for swift and sure consequences for alcohol-related offenses.
  - Educate law enforcement to be more diligent when recording information on alcohol-related offenses on the crash form.
- Enhance and expand safe rides home programs; reach out to large corporations for support.

### **COMMON THEMES**

While every region had their own unique issues and concerns, there were common themes that came up at virtually every meeting. The following is a summary of those themes:

- **Distracted Driving** – Each region felt distracted driving was a bigger issue than the reported data indicates. Part of the reason for this is because distracted driving is usually a self-reported behavior following a crash. This complicates the ability of law enforcement to cite a driver for a distracted driving offense. There is also a lack of research on effective countermeasures.
- **Young Driver Age Breakdown** – The majority of attendees felt the young driver emphasis area should target more than young people ages 16-20 and recommended the age breakdown be 16 to 24.
- **Driver Education** – There was a consensus for a review of the Virginia driver’s education program. Virginia is moving toward a program where private providers deliver the information. Some felt this has decreased oversight and the effectiveness of the program.
- **Pedestrians** – Pedestrians were more of a concern in urban areas but all the regions felt appropriate emphasis areas should address pedestrian issues.
- **Outreach and Education to the Judicial Community** – Regions cited the judicial community as a barrier to changing a driver’s behavior and attitude. Law enforcement officers, in particular, felt without swift and sure consequences for individuals who violate the law, there was little lasting impact of a citation or arrest. Participants felt judges needed to be educated about the importance of traffic safety and their role in improving safety. A number of individuals mentioned the Judicial Conference in which DMV actively participates every August as a possible venue for working with the judicial community.

- **Passage of primary seat belt law** – Virginia’s seat belt use rate has remained around 82 percent, which many feel is a good rate given the fact Virginia is a secondary law state. If seat belt use became a primary law, most feel the rate would increase.

## REGIONAL ISSUES

### Northern Virginia

- **Distracted driving**
  - Distracted driving in this region is an epidemic. Participant felt this because the behavior is self-reported and the actual numbers may be higher.
  - Consider combining the distracted driving emphasis area with alcohol and/or young drivers.
- **Pedestrian/Bicyclists/Motorcyclists Safety**
  - Make the SHSP and messaging multi-modal and ensure the public understands pedestrians, bicyclists, motorcycle riders are part of the overall plan. The current intersection fact sheet only mentions drivers and should include references to other types of road users.
  - For motorcyclists, the plan should consider the total percentage per population of motorcyclists, number of motorcyclists, and the percentage of the issue.
- **Immigrant population**
  - Identify better ways to reach new immigrant drivers, who may not be young drivers, i.e., Fairfax County pedestrian safety program in Four Corners area.
  - Provide information on sharing the road in English and Spanish in driver education classes.
  - When discussing pedestrian safety issues with immigrant populations, we should provide useful information and not just restate what is in the law. California’s DMV handbook may have some useful information since they have such a large immigrant population.
  - Obtain feedback from the target immigrant audience to ensure materials are culturally relevant.

### Richmond

- **Distracted Driving**
  - Distracted driving should be a focus for more than just young drivers; it affects all of the emphasis areas.
  - Do not limit discussion of distracted driving to just cell phone use and texting.
  - Texting and driving is currently a secondary offense. However, with no reasonable expectation of punishment people will continue to violate rules.
  - Consider including information on drowsy driving within this emphasis area, i.e., roadway departures.
- **Judicial Education**
  - Conduct a review of the sentencing process for traffic related violations; consider a court watch program.
    - Consider mandatory minimums
  - Provide education to judges including specific information on the fact that driving school is not always the answer.
    - Identify judges who take the issue seriously and develop a peer-to-peer program.

- **Data**
  - Conduct a comparison with national level data and other states to identify anomalies.
  - City of Richmond is updating their regional data for possible use in local crash analysis and problem identification. They are missing alcohol data but they are doing a study on pedestrians/bicycles which will be completed in the Spring of 2012
  - The emphasis area teams will have to organize the data to figure out the strategies; consider crosscutting strategies to address overlaps.
  - Conduct cost-benefit analysis whenever possible; and include performance-based data.
  - Provide crash data analysis by location; start out at the local level and then go up to the regional/state level.
- **Young Drivers**
  - Colleges lack an interest in youth programs in VA.
  - The driver's education program is broken in Virginia.
  - The definition of young drivers should be reconsidered and changed to 16 to 24 (insurance agencies drop rates for drivers older than 25). The emphasis area team may want to go even lower than age 16 and provide information for pre-teens.

## **Charlottesville**

- **Distracted Driving**
  - Distracted driving should not just be a part of the Young Drivers emphasis area; it should be part of roadway departure and other areas.
  - Young drivers and law enforcement need education on distracted driving.
  - Albemarle County (Charlottesville area) and other urban areas report many drivers texting/talking on the phone while driving.
- **Commercial Drivers**
  - Law enforcement is seeing more issues with commercial vehicles, i.e., carrying oversized loads uncovered (e.g. broken tree loads); the equipment is not maintained due to cutbacks; drivers are fatigued and drowsy; drivers speed; drivers lack English proficiency; crashes involving commercial vehicles are more severe.
  - There has been an increase in the number of commercial vehicle/motorcycle crashes.
  - Individuals with expertise in commercial vehicle inspection and safety are retiring; more qualified people are needed along with improved technology (Drive Cam, <http://www.drivecam.com>) so commercial vehicle violations can be identified.
  - Education on sharing the road with trucks and buses is lacking in VA.
- **Older Drivers**
  - Develop a mature driver education program.
  - Many non-reportable crashes involve elderly drivers, i.e., parking lots.
  - Older drivers tend to drive slower which creates other problems.
  - Law enforcement officers believe Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) does a good job of identifying drivers with deficiencies, i.e., they act on the medical review report form.
  - Families want law enforcement to take action on elderly driving behavior.

## Salem/Roanoke

### ▪ Roadway Departures

- The state needs to establish some criteria and help localities identify priorities for the most serious traffic safety issues and help with identifying contributing factors.
- Weather and maintenance makes things difficult. Problems started when VDOT was cut back and manpower reduced, which increased the time it takes to fix things.
- A lack of wreckers/environmental contractors in the region makes it difficult to clear tractor-trailer crashes; multi layers of approval are required. The length of time crashes are on the roadway increases the chances for secondary incidents.
- Farm equipment on the roadway is another issue because they go so slow.

### ▪ Distracted Driving

- Distracted driving is hard to enforce particularly given the self-reporting bias. Drivers will not admit to being distracted so fatalities and injuries may be higher. Virginia has a secondary text law (primary for young drivers), no cell phone law.

### ▪ Older Drivers

- The region has a high elderly driver population, which will only be increasing in the next several years, and a lack of access to public transportation, which will keep more of these drivers in their own cars.
  - Develop and implement senior driver education programs and focus on such things as pedal confusion, the use of parking brakes, slow driving along I-81.
  - Consider reducing insurance rates for those elderly drivers who take a driving class.
  - Determine the possibility of a DMV test for elderly drivers.

## Hampton Roads

### ▪ Distracted Driving

- Distracted driving numbers are artificially low.
- There should be a primary law on distracted driving.
- Provide education on distracted driving including telling people not to drive with their cell phone; indicate the effects are the same as impaired driving; make sure the issue covers more than just cell phones.

### ▪ Impaired Driving

- Safe Rides programs – The region currently has a safe rides program conducted by one of the cab companies in the area.
- Designated drivers – There is also a good deal of promotion for designated drivers in the region.

### ▪ Older Drivers

- The Tidewater area has high numbers of older drivers. To find out how many may be unsafe; review the medical review forms submitted to DMV.
- AAA Tidewater has a Silver Drivers program that provides information at Senior Expos; the organization also conducts CarFit events.
- May want to reach out to law enforcement officers and encourage them to fill out medical referral forms for unsafe older drivers.
- Consider a vision test for older drivers.

- Law enforcement feels children of older drivers look to police officers to be the ones to recommend DMV take a license away.

Two of the regions, Hampton Roads and Salem/Roanoke, have existing traffic safety organizations.

- Two safety boards exist in the region, the Blue Ridge Transportation Safety Board and the Central Transportation Safety Board in Lynchburg. The local safety board structure may be beneficial in other regions. The Salem/Roanoke region has a Blue Ridge Crash Investigation Team, which is a very effective tool in identifying the causes of crashes.
- The Hampton Roads region has several existing programs including the Drive Safe program in Hampton Roads, a program conducted with the Navy, and the AAA Tidewater program, Get It Together, which is in 33 schools and involves 45,000 kids.