

Executive Committee for Highway Safety
Meeting Minutes; Mtg. #7
January 26, 2005

Location:

Chief Engineer's Conference Room, Beryl Drive @ 9:30 a.m.

Committee Members in Attendance:

David King	Susan Coward	Bob Andrews	Debbie Barbour
Fletcher Clay	Doug Galyon	Terry Hopkins	Darrell Jernigan
Kevin Lacy	Mike Stanley	Ashley Memory	Doug Robertson
John Sullivan	Adam Fisher	Mike Yaniero	

Guests in Attendance:

Lori Cove	Alpesh Patel	Katie Jones	Jessica Jones	Brad Hibbs
Max Tate	Don Volker	Chris Hartley	Don Nail	Cassandra Skinner
Ken Smith	Chris Broom	Cliff Braam		

Scribe:

Cliff Braam

Minutes:

- The meeting began at approximately 9:35 a.m.

Task I – Welcome

David opened the meeting and everyone introduced themselves for the benefit of new members and guest that were present.

Doug Galyon informed the group that the DOT Board of Transportation was very interested in the activities of the Executive Committee and the strategies that are being developed.

Task II – DOT Statewide Transportation Plan Overview

Lori Cove and Alpesh Patel gave the committee an overview of the DOT Statewide Transportation Plan that was adopted by the DOT Board of Transportation on September 2, 2004. This is a 25 year long range plan that covers all modes of transportation that outlines key issues, needs, revenues and expenditures, implementation and goals.

Copies of the presentation will be available on the ECHS web site.

Doug R.	We need to ensure that 'safety' is not just a word that is used loosely, but rather a way of doing business on a daily basis.
Kevin	The Traffic Safety Unit is already looking at the scoping of TIP projects and

	<p>taking a much more active role in this process than what has historically been done. Hopefully, this will help ensure that highway safety issues within a project's limits or even those within close proximity to the project will be addressed at the early stages of a project.</p> <p>Also, the strategy presented at the last meeting from the Lane Departure Working Group, involving geometric enhancements, is being incorporated. The Traffic Safety Unit will be working with our operations staff across the state to identify projects from a safety needs basis and to provide the operations staff with any additional pertinent safety information they may need. This process has begun.</p>
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Task III – Fatal Trends Update

Kevin gave the committee an update on our fatal trends. Since 1990, there has been a 15% increase in our fatalities, while vehicle miles traveled (VMT) in the has increased by over 40%. The trend line since 2002 (our base year) has flattened out as compared to 1990 – 2002. If we can continue to keep the trend line flat with the annual increase in VMT, then we can begin to push down the numbers with the success that should come from the implementation of the strategies being developed. The ultimate goal should be to achieve sustainable safety.

Doug R.	<p>Looking at VMT, if it continues to increase between now and 2008 as it has been, then that will lower our fatal rate to from about 1.6 to 1.3. Therefore, if we are going to achieve a fatal rate of 1.0 by 2008, then we need to begin putting these strategies into place very quickly. We need to look for any and all opportunities to speed up the process of getting the strategies implemented as fast as possible.</p>
David	<p>Currently, our crash tax is \$1,100 per person per year. This means that the cost of traffic crashes, the associated injuries and fatalities cost each person in the state \$1,100 each year.</p>

Task IV – Working Groups; Updates and Strategies

AGGRESSIVE DRIVING WORKING GROUP

Kevin reported that this group has struggled since the beginning on how best to proceed and to define aggressive driving. Aggressive driving is one of those things that when you see it, you know what it is, but to define those actions in a manner which can be easily enforced and validated through crash and/or citation data is very difficult and something that this group has not been able to do.

At the end of last year, North Carolina passed new legislation for aggressive driving, but the group feels that this new statute has little chance of being successfully applied in the real world.

In addition, most of the circumstances surrounding aggressive driving, i.e. speed, etc., are being addressed in other areas and/or working groups.

It is recommended that the Aggressive Driving Working Group be disbanded.

David	Is there anybody who objects to this group being disbanded in favor of adopting another issue that we can make more progress on with the resources and time constraints?
Note	There were no objections. The next working group that will replace the Aggressive Driving working group was not discussed due to a lack of time.

ENSURING DRIVERS ARE LICENSED WORKING GROUP

Cliff presented the latest strategy, “**More Accurate Identification of Revoked Drivers**” from this group to the committee. One problem with reducing the number of Driving While License Revoked (DWLR) offenders is the initial identification of these offenders by law enforcement officers. Law enforcement depends on the Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV) data to provide information regarding a subject’s license status. Sometimes an offender provides inaccurate or partial identification to a law enforcement officer (LEO); this results in the creation of a new DMV record and allows the offender to avoid a charge of DWLR. Sometimes an offender shows a law enforcement officer a “valid” out-of-state license, but the offender is DWLR in North Carolina. This strategy will modify the computer information systems used by LEOs to greatly facilitate the identification of DWLR offenders.

The first modification would be to link license plate information to driver’s license status information. When LEOs check the vehicle registration database, they should receive information about both the vehicle and the license status of the owner.

A second modification would be to link out-of-state and in-state information. That is, when an out-of-state license is checked, that driver’s status in NC should also be automatically checked.

A third modification involves better “wildcard search functions” for checking driver’s license information. This would allow offenders giving LEOs partial information to be properly identified. This function would need to include “qualifiers” on the wildcard searches to prevent such searches from overloading the system and potentially shutting it down.

Cliff told the committee that this strategy had Commissioner Tatum’s support and would be integrated into efforts that DMV is currently pursuing.

Kevin made the motion that the committee approve this strategy. The motion was seconded by Bob and was unanimously approved by all members present. None Opposed.

The strategy will be hosted by the Division of Motor Vehicles, Commissioner Tatum, to pursue full implementation.

INCREASING SAFETY BELT USAGE WORKING GROUP

Darrel presented the strategy “**Eliminating Safety Belt Exemptions and Increasing Penalties for Non-Compliance**”. This strategy began as several individual strategies that the group finally

decided to combine into one all inclusive strategy due to the seriousness of this issue and the large number of fatalities that are being caused by unbuckled motorists.

Although North Carolina’s safety belt use rate remains steady at 86.1 percent, it needs to be understood that this compliance rate is obtained from observational studies monitoring *only* front seat occupants of vehicles. In 2003, 36% of all highway fatalities in North Carolina was an unbelted vehicle occupant, while nearly half (43%) of motor vehicle related fatalities were unbelted. The data is shown below.

Total Fatalities:	1,552		
	<u>Total</u>	<u>Unbelted</u>	
Drivers Killed:	913	380	(41.6%)
Passengers Killed:	388	174	(44.9%)
Total Vehicle Occupants:	1,301	554	(42.6%)

A recent 2004 survey found that North Carolina’s pickup truck and van safety belt usage rates lag far behind. These two vehicle types include many vehicles that are licensed as either Farm or Commercial vehicles (which presently are exempt from current safety belt laws.) Statewide safety belt surveys reveal that usage by drivers and occupants of pickup trucks is only 78.5% and that of full size vans is only 68.0 %. These rates compare to cars, minivans and sport utility vehicles, which are all above 90%. This represents a significant discrepancy and costs the state and taxpayers when the unbuckled drivers and passengers are injured or killed in crashes. The state also loses federal funding due to a safety belt usage rate that is lower than it could be if operators of Farm and Commercial vehicles were required to wear belts at all times.

Recent increases in total costs for front seat occupants not using their safety belts (from \$25 to \$75) had little to no effect on the compliance rates. It is evident that this small, one time fine has not been a sufficient enough penalty within itself to have the desired effect of increasing the overall compliance rate. The inability to assess either driver’s license or insurance points to the violation also dilutes the law’s effectiveness.

North Carolina has had many programs that have been beneficial in elevating safety belt compliance rates to the present levels, however, due to the number of annual fatalities that are unbelted, the time has come to take a more aggressive stance in saving lives by increasing the number of vehicle occupants that are properly restrained with safety belts. This is another opportunity for North Carolina to serve as a national leader and role model in highway safety.

The successful implementation of this strategy will result in legislative changes that will modify the current safety belt law to eliminate the exemptions that currently exist for “any vehicle registered and licensed as a property-carrying vehicle in accordance with G.S. 20-88...” and also increase the penalties for not using safety belts. The changes to be implemented under this strategy are summarized as follows:

- Mandate safety belt usage for **all** vehicles except as exempt by Federal Standards,

- Mandate safety belt usage for **all** seating positions in a vehicle,
- Increase fines for non-compliance from \$25 per violation to \$100 per violation,
- Assess one driver’s license point to the operator’s license for non-compliance,
- Assess one insurance point to the operator for non-compliance and
- Change the N.C. vehicle inspection process so that all applicable vehicles are checked to ensure that safety belts are present and operational.

Name	Item
Colonel Clay	Motor Carrier Safety Administration is pushing for legislation toward removing the exemptions for commercial motor vehicles. Successful implementation of this strategy would take care of this. Charlie Deal with the North Carolina Trucking Association would also be 100% supportive of this.
Kevin	If we only save 50% of the lives lost to being unbuckled, this would drop our fatal rate to 1.38.
Darrell	The key to this strategy will be its marketing and how successful we can sell it to the legislators and other key people.
Susan	Would have no problem sending this out as one package.
Cassandra	The child safety restraint law met with a lot of opposition.
Susan	I think this was mainly due to the associated costs of having to buy car seats.
Kevin	There would be no additional cost for this strategy.
Kevin	Is there any member of the committee that is opposed to this strategy or who would not support it? (No one was opposed.)
Doug G.	I don’t see any reason why the Board of Transportation would not support this.

Colonel Clay made the motion that the committee approve this strategy. The motion was seconded by Doug Galyon and was unanimously approved by all members present. None Opposed.

The strategy will be hosted by the Governor’s Highway Safety Program, Darrell Jernigan, to pursue full implementation.

KEEPING DRIVERS ALERT WORKING GROUP

Doug R. presented the strategy “**Conduct Education and Awareness Campaigns to Increase Younger Drivers’ Awareness of the Risks of Driver Distractions**”. This strategy will target young people who are getting ready to drive and those who are in the early years of driving with the intention of educating them on the dangers of distracted driving. The group will conduct focus groups with kids using personnel from HSRC and DOT in an effort to craft a message and program to bring back to the committee for approval.

Katie told the committee the goal was to increase the awareness of teens about the dangers of distracted driving and to solicit involvement of the teens in what the message should be and how it should be presented.

Jessica said that the plan was to conduct two focus groups in each of the three regions of the state (mountains, piedmont and coast) with one group being held at a middle school and one at a high school.

The committee supports the plan of action for this strategy.

Doug also told the committee about a similar strategy targeting drowsy drivers and provided committee members with a draft copy of the strategy for review.

SPEED WORKING GROUP

Kevin briefed the committee on the efforts of the speed working group and told them about a recent meeting with the District Attorney in Winston-Salem, Tom Keith to discuss the issues and challenges faced in the courts. Kevin said it was readily apparent that the DA's have more problems than we could imagine. There were several good ideas generated from this meeting and at the next meeting of this working group, these will be discussed and strategies should be drafted. These strategies will be targeted towards assisting the court system and/or opportunities to remove barriers that they encounter.

LANE DEPARTURE WORKING GROUP

Kevin reported to the committee that the lane departure working group had begun looking at drivers education as its next strategy and that this was an issue of interest to several other working groups (Safety Belt, KDA). Current general statutes specifying what is to be taught in the driver's education curriculum are outdated and do not adequately reflect today's issues facing young drivers. A strategy to modify this statute was drafted and comments were received. At the last meeting of this group, the comments were discussed and the group generated more questions than answers. This will be discussed in more detail at the next meeting and more research will be done into the issues before then.

It was mentioned that there are several private "advanced" driver's education programs in the state now that provide actual hands on experience of how to react and handle hazardous situations. This group will be investigating these further to determine if these may be a better alternative than the programs currently offered.

Governor's DWI Task Force

Darrell reported that the final report from the task force was presented to the Governor on January 14, 2005. The report had many recommendations for improving the current issues.

A copy of the final report can be found on the GHSP web site along with the agendas and minutes of the task force's meetings. The link is show below:

<http://www.ncdot.org/secretary/GHSP/DWI/Word/FinalReport.doc>

The meeting was adjourned at 11:30 a.m.

- ◆ **Next Meeting: April 28, 2005; 9:30 – 11:30 Chief Engineer's Conference Room**