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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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National Working Summit tackles an “Epidemic on Wheels”

The National Center for Rural Road Safety (Safety Center), led by the Western Transportation Institute at Montana State University Bozeman, hosted the National Working Summit on Transportation in Rural America last week, drawing 120 enthusiastic participants from around the country who worked together for three days on identifying issues and strategies to reduce injuries and fatalities on rural roads and highways.

There are more than 4 million miles of roads in the U.S., and more than 70% of them are in rural areas. Efforts to improve rural road safety not only protect rural residents, they protect every individual, family, and truck driver that uses rural roads and highways to move across the country. With only 19% of people living in rural areas, 54% of fatal crashes occur on rural roads, killing more than 18,000 people a year. Dr. David Sleet from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention called the problem “an epidemic on wheels.”

Held in Denver, Colorado from September 7 – 9, the Summit encouraged collaboration among a broad range of agencies with an interest in enhancing safety on rural roads: departments of transportation, first responders, law enforcement, commerce/freight organizations, economic development/tourism agencies, public health agencies, local/county governments, and tribal agencies.



2016 National Working Summit on Transportation in Rural America Attendees

Using an innovative discussion format, participants first worked in peer groups to identify key issues and gaps for a particular interest area (such as “commerce and freight” or “emergency response”). Later, they participated in integrated multi-disciplinary group discussions to formulate concepts and priorities from a multi-discipline perspective on broader topics such as livability and

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Towards Zero Deaths initiatives. “Our working theme was ‘3 days, 10 discussion topics, 1 white paper’”, said Steve Albert, Safety Center Director; “we wanted to benefit from the expertise of everyone who attended and define a clear roadmap of how best to make rural roads safer in the future.”

Participants were also inspired to action by the summit keynote speakers, who included Mark Glaser, author of *58 Feet – The Second that Changed Our Lives*. Glaser has worked to raise awareness of traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries following a serious motorcycle accident in 2010 on a rural mountain road in Colorado. The closing keynote speaker was Commissioner Jill Ryan, of Eagle County (Colorado) who has used her public health background to develop motor vehicle crash prevention programs in Colorado.

Actions proposed during the summit included:

- Encourage state and local departments of transportation/public works to incorporate “Toward zero death” goals and initiatives into their strategic plans
- Encourage public health organization involvement in the development of roadway safety plans
- Document and disseminate successful safety solutions from other countries
- Provide summit speakers to present on and share comprehensive agency safety plans with state and local agencies.

Presentations from the summit are now available at <https://ruralsafetycenter.org/news-events/moving-rural-america-summit/>. The complete findings and recommendations from the summit will be compiled into a white paper later this fall, which will guide future action. The white paper will be presented in a Safety Center webinar on Thursday, November 10th at 1 pm Eastern.

Register here:

<http://events.r20.constantcontact.com/register/event?oeidk=a07ed7kgph21e9dec1&llr=ngyyawuab>. In addition, many participants recommended holding a second summit in the future. “Thanks to everyone’s hard work we have a lot of great ideas and solid recommendations to build on,” said Hillary Isebrands, FHWA Safety Engineer and FHWA Program Manager for the Safety Center; “most importantly, we rallied an enthusiastic group of experts who are committed to continuing this work to make rural roads safer.”



Safety Center Team Members in Attendance at the 2016 Summit

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The National Working Summit on Transportation in Rural America was hosted by the National Center for Rural Road Safety, and sponsored by the Center for Advanced Infrastructure and Transportation at Rutgers University and the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO). Many organizations provided meeting facilitation and organization assistance via a steering committee, including:

- *National Center for Rural Road Safety ,*
- *FHWA,*
- *National Association of County Engineers (NACE),*
- *National Association of Development Organizations (NADO),*
- *National Association of Counties (NACo),*
- *National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA),*
- *Transportation Safety Advancement Group (TSAG),*
- *ITS America, and*
- *Meetings Northwest.*

The National Center for Rural Road Safety is supported by the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration under Cooperative Agreement No. DTFH6114H00021. It is managed by a team of transportation experts at the following entities: the Western Transportation Institute at Montana State University; the Center for Advanced Infrastructure and Transportation at Rutgers University; the Institute for Transportation at Iowa State University; Cambridge Systematics; IDT Group; and Bubar and Hall Consulting, LLC; in cooperation with the Local Technical Assistance Programs (LTAPs) of Iowa, Louisiana, Montana, and New Jersey.

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