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Volume 20 | December 2020



## Safety Sidekick Newsletter

This fall was certainly a busy one at the Rural Safety Center! Thank you to everyone who joined us for the 3<sup>rd</sup> National Summit on Rural Road Safety. Although we were unable to be in person, we had record breaking attendance and fantastic multidisciplinary discussions on the safe system approach and safety culture. A very special thank you again to all of our sponsors, exhibitors, speakers, and facilitators who helped make the summit possible! We were also thrilled with the level of participation in the inaugural Rural Road Safety Awareness Week and cannot wait to continue the event in the future! Many of you not only shared our social media posts, but also created your own original content! Thank you for helping us shine a light on #RuralRoadSafety!

The Rural Safety Center was also humbled to be considered as a finalist for the National Safety Council's Green Cross Safety Advocate Award and would like to congratulate *Save the Michaels of the World* for winning the award! The work that they do is inspiring and I hope you will read more about them [here](#).

In this edition of the newsletter, along with articles on some of the above mentioned items, you will also read about the new Every Day Counts (EDC-6) Innovations, updated statistics from NHTSA, the new TRB Rural Transportation Issues Coordination Council, new hot off the press resources (including ITS case studies from NADO, new videos from FHWA, new tribal resources from CDC, NHTSA's new Tribal Crash Reporting Toolkit, and FHWA's new LRSP DIY website) and much more!

As we head into 2021, all of us at the Rural Safety Center would like to wish you happy and healthy holidays. We look forward to continuing to work with you in the new year. Stay safe!

Sincerely,

Jaime Sullivan  
Center Director  
National Center for Rural Road Safety  
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Safety Center Update

In addition to the updates provided in the Director's letter above, over the past few months, the Rural Safety Center: was featured in The Roadway Safety Foundation's [Road Safety at Rush Hour](#) Podcast Episode 10: The Road to Zero Transportation Fatalities in Rural America; conducted a stakeholder meeting to update our stakeholders on the recent work of the RSC and to get their input on upcoming resources; and honored to be asked to serve on the National Safety Council's [Road to Zero](#) Steering Committee to bring our rural perspective and expertise to the group.

The Rural Safety Center has also been busy finalizing some new products and presentations for release in the new year. Please keep your eye out for the following in 2021:

- A TRB workshop 1041: Heading out Way? National Standards for Wildlife-Vehicle Collision (WVC) Data Collection on Jan. 22 from 2-5 PM ET;
- The first modules from the Road Safety Champion Program for use by other trainers who would like to administer the program;
- Resources and an action plan for Growing Traffic Safety Culture in a Rural Community;
- A webinar overview of the ROADs App;
- A presentation on rural safety at the ATSSA conference;
- A presentation on rural safety during the March [Drive Smart VA Virtual Safety Series](#); and
- And much more....

### **Rural Transportation Issues Coordinating Council (A0040C)**

During the restructuring of the Transportation Research Board (TRB) in 2020 came the creation of four coordination councils. These coordination councils are a "unique and important resource to the technical activities committees" that will provide "expertise and advice relative to specific cross-cutting issues, often complex multimodal and multidisciplinary related to type of geographic area, major demographic group or some other overarching constituency within transportation (CC Planning Document, TRB 2020)." The four coordination councils created include: Young Members Coordination Council (A0010C), International Coordination Council (A0020C), City Transportation Issues Coordination Council (A0030C), and Rural Transportation Issues Coordination Council (A0040C).

The Rural Transportation Issues Coordination Council (RTICC) will "promote among the Technical Activities committees attention to the specific and unique circumstances related to providing transportation to and within rural areas. All aspects of rural transportation are considered, including but not limited to planning, design, construction, operations and service provision, maintenance. This relates to transportation of both people and goods and service to rural communities, markets and people (CC Planning Document, TRB 2020)."

Due to the recent creation of the coordination councils, the RTICC is still in the strategic planning phase including identifying partner committees, organizing their council structure, and creating their strategic plan for the next 6 years. The RTICC is seeking YOUR INPUT into how they can be the most useful to TRB committees and to supporting rural transportation. To provide your feedback, please consider joining the A0040C friends list through [MyTRB](#) and attending one of their sponsored events at the upcoming 2021 TRB annual meeting:

1. Thurs. Jan 7<sup>th</sup> from 6-7 pm ET Meet the Chairs: Rural Transportation Issues Coordination Council and City Transportation Issues Coordination Council (A0030C, A0040C, AE000)
2. Wed. Jan 13<sup>th</sup> from 12-1:30 pm ET Rural Transportation Issues Coordination Council Meeting (A0040C)
3. Wed. Jan. 27<sup>th</sup> from 1-2:30 pm ET TRB Session #1280 Hot Topics in Rural Transportation sponsored by A0040C

For more information or questions on the RTICC, please contact the council chair Jaime Sullivan at [Jaime.sullivan2@montana.edu](mailto:Jaime.sullivan2@montana.edu).

## **Safety Center Blog**

### **Third Rural Road Safety Summit: Virtual Format Leads to Record Attendance**

The National Center for Rural Road Safety hosted the 3<sup>rd</sup> National

Summit on Rural Road Safety from September 30 – October 1, 2020. The summits have become an important national forum for engaging a wide variety of stakeholders and raising awareness on critical rural road safety issues. With a new virtual format, the summit blended effective elements from the last two forums with innovative types of engagement made possible by the online setting. Some of the benefits of this approach included increased attendance, access to new speakers and presenters, and highly positive feedback from attendees.



Many resources are shared over the course of the summit, which can be overwhelming for some of the newer safety practitioners. During the closing session, one participant asked, “where do I start to improve safety on rural roads?” Suggested action items included:

- **Focus** – When a new subject area is overwhelming, achieving clarity or focus can be the hardest part. Pick one topic or goal to make progress on each day and go after that. People will know you for this “one thing,” which will attract others to you. Eventually, you will create a network of colleagues talking about this common interest.
- **Go to them** – In a rural area where distances can be large and resources are lacking, do not ask others to come to you, make sure you go to them.
- **Create a robust network** – With a network of partners, it will generally only take a few phone calls or emails to find a solution or the resource you need.

To learn more about the National Summit on Rural Road Safety including the key takeaways and the benefits of going virtual this year, read the [Safety Center December Blog Post](#).

## Engineering



### FHWA Announces Support for Seven Innovations for a Nation on the Move

The U.S. Department of Transportation’s Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) announced seven innovations it will support in the sixth round of its “Every Day Counts” (EDC-6) collaboration with state, local and tribal transportation agencies. The EDC program promotes the accelerated use of tools, technologies and methods nationwide to improve road and bridge projects, reduce cost and shorten their time to completion.

“Every Day Counts is a key Department initiative that provides state, local, and Tribal transportation leaders with opportunities to learn about ready-to-deploy innovations that best fit their individual needs,” said U.S. Transportation Secretary Elaine L. Chao.

Since the creation of “Every Day Counts” in 2010, FHWA has worked with state, local and Tribal governments, as well as federal agencies to widen the use of dozens of innovations that lead to better roads, bridges and highways, reduced project delivery times and more cost-effective transportation improvements. Later this year, FHWA will hold three virtual summit meetings, focused on “People,” “Products,” and “Process,” to discuss the EDC-6 innovations in more detail.

“This round of innovations has incredible potential to help agencies with limited resources deliver projects more effectively, improve safety, and support the nation’s economic recovery,” said Federal Highway Administrator Nicole R. Nason.

The solicitation for EDC-6 ideas this year generated more than 100 suggestions and comments from stakeholders across the country. The seven innovations selected are:

- [Crowdsourcing to Advance Operations](#)
- [e-Ticketing and Digital As-Builts](#)
- [Virtual Public Involvement \(VPI\)](#)
- [Next-Generation Traffic Incident Management \(NextGen TIM\)](#)
- [Strategic Workforce Development](#)
- [Targeted Overlay Pavement Solutions](#)
- [Ultra-High Performance Concrete \(UHPC\) for Bridge Preservation and Repair](#)

More information on EDC can be found at <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/innovation/everydaycounts/>.

### FHWA Launches Local Road Safety Plan "Do It Yourself" Website for Local Agencies

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) recently unveiled a unique site to help local agencies reduce serious and fatal crashes on their roadways. The [Local Road Safety Plan Do-It-Yourself Website](#) includes resources local agencies and their partners need to create these lifesaving plans.



Approximately 40% of the nation's fatalities occur on locally-owned roads – an average of 12,000 deaths each year. Local road safety plans (LRSPs) are an FHWA [proven safety countermeasure](#) local agencies can use to identify at-risk locations on their roadways and deploy cost-effective safety solutions.

FHWA, in cooperation with the National Association of County Engineers and the National Local Technical Assistance Program, has spent the last five years helping local agencies create these plans, but with more than 23,000 local agencies in the country, it is impossible to deliver in-person training to all of them. FHWA developed the site to connect with all local agencies efficiently.

"Local road safety plans get results and we have great interest in them from across the country," said Jerry Roche, FHWA safety engineer and project manager for the web site. "We designed the site to be as personable and intuitive as possible, to emulate an in-person training in the virtual environment."

The LRSP DIY site begins with an introduction page to orient users and follows with subsequent pages that walk them through the steps of the LRSP process:

- Identify Stakeholders
- Use Safety Data
- Choose Proven Solutions
- Implement Solutions

The site contains training videos, downloadable templates, "local agency insights" videos where practitioners can learn from their peers, and example plans from other local agencies.

"Our goal is to connect FHWA to America's 3,000 counties and 20,000 cities and towns that could benefit from a local road safety plan," FHWA Administrator Nicole R. Nason said. "This innovative new tool includes everything local agencies need to develop a local road safety plan to help reduce fatalities on their local roads."

- View the site: <https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/LRSPDIY/>
- Watch an animated overview video on LRSPs: <https://youtu.be/Wzdm798Mol8?>
- For more information, contact Hillary Isebrands at [hillary.isebrands@dot.gov](mailto:hillary.isebrands@dot.gov) or Jerry Roche at [jerry.roche@dot.gov](mailto:jerry.roche@dot.gov)

### 2019 Fatality Data Show Continued Annual Decline in Traffic Deaths

The U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration released a preview of [2019 data from the Fatality Analysis Reporting System](#) and preliminary [estimates for the first half of 2020](#). Alongside the release of the 2019 preview data and 2020 first-half



fatality projections, the agency issued two companion reports, [Special Report: Examination of the Traffic Safety Environment During the Second Quarter of 2020](#) and [Drug and Alcohol Prevalence in Seriously and Fatally Injured Road Users Before and During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency](#).

Traffic deaths decreased nationwide during 2019 as compared to 2018. There were 36,096 fatalities in motor vehicle traffic crashes in 2019. This represents a decrease of 739 (down 2%) from the reported 36,835 fatalities in 2018, even though vehicle miles traveled increased by nearly 1%. As a result, the fatality rate for 2019 was 1.10 fatalities per 100 million VMT – the lowest rate since 2014, down from 1.14 fatalities per 100 million VMT in 2018.

Fatalities decreased in most major traffic safety categories in 2019:

- Passenger vehicle occupants (down 2.8%)
- Motorcyclists (down 0.5%)
- Pedestrians (down 2.7%)
- Pedalcyclists (down 2.9%)

Fatalities in crashes involving at least one large truck showed relatively no change, decreasing from 5,006 in 2018 to 5,005 in 2019. Large trucks include both commercial and non-commercial trucks with a gross vehicle weight rating over 10,000 pounds.

NHTSA also released preliminary fatality estimates for the first half of 2020. The second quarter of 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 public health emergency, showed a continued decline in overall traffic fatalities. The FARS data indicate that an estimated 8,870 people died in motor vehicle traffic crashes in the second quarter of 2020, a decrease of about 3.3% compared to the second quarter of 2019, which translates into 302 fewer fatalities as compared to the same period in 2019.

At the same time, at the height of the COVID-19 public health emergency, the total traffic volume decreased by more than 16% in the first six months of 2020. Because traffic volumes decreased more significantly than did the number of fatal crashes, the traffic fatality rate per 100 million VMT is projected to increase to 1.25 in the first half of 2020, up from 1.06 in the same period in 2019.

“Road safety is always our top priority, and while we are encouraged by today’s reports showing a continued decline in total fatalities in 2019 and into the first half of 2020, we are concerned by the trend since April showing an increased fatality rate,” said NHTSA Deputy Administrator James Owens. “Now, more than ever, we should be watching ourselves for safe driving practices and encouraging others to do the same. It’s irresponsible and illegal to drive under the influence of drugs or alcohol, taking risks not only with one’s own life, but with the lives of others.”

To assist stakeholders in evaluating the trend and identifying countermeasures, NHTSA researchers compiled data from a wide variety of sources to produce a special report. The study suggests that during the height of the national public health emergency and associated lockdowns, driving patterns and behaviors changed significantly, and that drivers who remained on the roads engaged in more risky behavior, including speeding, failing to wear seat belts, and driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Traffic data indicates that average speeds increased during the second quarter, and examples of extreme speeds became more common, while the evidence suggests that fewer people involved in crashes used their seat belts.

NHTSA also released a study of seriously or fatally injured road users at five participating trauma centers during this time, finding that between mid-March and mid-July almost two-thirds of drivers tested positive for at least one active drug, including alcohol, marijuana, or opioids. In particular, the number of such drivers testing positive for opioids nearly doubled after mid-March, as compared to the previous six months, while marijuana use increased by about 50%.

NHTSA announced a series of workshops with stakeholders to bring together State and local officials and safety advocates to discuss data and develop countermeasures to address these serious safety concerns. Over the summer, NHTSA launched a new campaign to remind motorists to drive safely and follow traffic safety laws. NHTSA’s high-visibility enforcement campaign to combat impaired driving ran through the Labor Day weekend and will be repeated later this year in time for the holidays.

For more information, contact NHTSA Media [NHTSAmmedia@dot.gov](mailto:NHTSAmmedia@dot.gov)

## Road Users

**Now Available: Tribal Crash Reporting Toolkit**



The new Tribal Crash Reporting Toolkit enables improved collection and use of crash data by Tribal governments. The toolkit enables Tribal Governments to maintain data sovereignty while consistently collecting a standardized set of data elements for each crash.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) published the toolkit in October 2020 to help Tribes in all phases of safety data improvement. Tribes can use the Self-Assessment tool to identify elements of safety data management that could be improved. The Crash Reporting Facts and Fictions Tool can further enhance the planning of safety data improvements by dispelling common barriers to crash data improvement. A data analysis tool describes common ways that safety data is used to improve transportation safety. Other tools contain the framework needed to establish a crash reporting system. These include a crash reporting form, officer's instruction manual, database, quality control guide, and a manual that describes all of the available tools. All of these tools are available at no cost at <https://www.tribalsafety.org/tribal-crash-reporting-toolkit>.

The toolkit is based on the Model Minimum Uniform Crash Criteria (MMUCC) standard and was developed by NHTSA in partnership with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Several Tribes participated in a pilot of the toolkit contents. The Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe Police Department tested the Crash Reporting Form and Database.

The 2015 Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act addressed crash reporting in Tribal areas by stating "without more accurate reporting of crashes... it is difficult or impossible to fully understand the nature of the problem and develop appropriate countermeasures..." and "improved crash reporting by tribal law enforcement agencies would facilitate safety planning and would enable Indian tribes to apply more successfully for State and Federal funds for safety improvements." In response to the FAST Act, the FHWA developed a report to Congress titled "Tribal governments and transportation safety data." Later, the Bureau of Indian Affairs Office of Justice Services published the report "Indian Highway Safety Program: Tribal Crash Reporting Assessments." Based on this research, at least 20% of Tribal Police departments may not be using a standardized crash report. Also, half of the Tribes participating in a recent study reported using a paper reporting system rather than electronic. The Tribal Crash Reporting Toolkit addresses these and many other improvements for crash reporting.

For additional information about the Tribal Crash Reporting Toolkit, please contact Tom Bragan ([Tom.Bragan@dot.gov](mailto:Tom.Bragan@dot.gov)) or Adam Larsen ([Adam.Larsen@dot.gov](mailto:Adam.Larsen@dot.gov)).

## **Crash Rates for Drivers in their 70s Drop Below Those of Middle-Aged Drivers**

Drivers in their 70s are now less likely to be involved in a fatal crash than those in their prime working years, a new study from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety has found. That's a remarkable reversal for a generation of drivers once thought to be an outsize threat to themselves and others on the road.

The number of older drivers has grown rapidly over the past two decades. But better health and safer vehicles, as well as possible benefits from infrastructure improvements and changes to licensing policies, have prevented an accompanying spike in crashes. Not only do drivers in their 70s now have fewer fatal crashes per licensed driver, but they also have fewer police-reported crashes per mile traveled than middle-aged drivers.

"Although efforts to address the 'silver tsunami' were largely ad hoc, in hindsight what we ended up with was a systems approach," IIHS President David Harkey says. "And it worked."

A systems approach examines the interconnected factors that contribute to a problem to develop a more holistic solution. Today, many highway safety advocates promote systems thinking to tackle a variety of road safety issues.

Historically, older drivers were more likely to crash than other age groups, and they were less likely to survive if they did crash. With the aging of the Baby Boom generation, a potential road safety crisis loomed on the horizon, the National Academies warned in 1988. A decade later, fatal crashes involving older drivers peaked at more than 4,800 in 1997.

For the new study, IIHS researchers compared trends among drivers 70 and over with drivers ages 35-54, looking at fatal crash involvements per 100,000 licensed drivers and per vehicle mile traveled, police-reported crash involvements per vehicle mile traveled, and the number of driver deaths per 1,000 police-reported crashes.

The number of older licensed drivers rose almost twice as fast from 2010 to 2018 as it had in the previous decade, while older drivers' average annual mileage also continued to grow.

"Improvements in healthcare mean that older Americans are remaining active and staying in the workforce," says Jessica Cicchino, IIHS vice president for research and a co-author of the study. "It follows that they're not only keeping their licenses longer but also driving more miles."

At the same time, improved health means older drivers are less likely to crash because the onset of problems like failing eyesight and impaired cognitive function is delayed. Seniors who are in better shape are also more likely to survive if they do crash.

Vehicles have gotten safer, too. The proportion of registered vehicles that earn good ratings in IIHS crash tests increases each year, and safety innovations like side airbags have been especially beneficial for older drivers.

Spurred in part by Federal Highway Administration training courses and a handbook of proven interventions launched in 1998, infrastructure changes designed to address common problems faced by older drivers, such as making traffic signs easier to see and converting intersections to roundabouts, may have had an impact as well.

For the full article and more data, please visit [here](#).

## Upcoming Trainings & Events

### Applications for the 2021 Virtual Lifesavers National Conference on Highway Safety Priorities Traffic Safety Scholars Program Open November 23rd

The Traffic Safety Scholars Program provides registration reimbursement to help full- and part-time undergraduate and graduate students, in a variety of fields, defray the cost of attending the nation's largest virtual gathering of traffic safety professionals April 26-28. A letter of accreditation will be sent to the Scholar upon completion of the Traffic Safety Scholars Program [Requirements](#).



Scholars will also earn service credits toward the [Presidential Volunteer Service Award](#) in addition to earning "medallions" to add to their LinkedIn and other social media pages.

**The deadline to submit an application is January 8, 2021.**

A flyer detailing the application process can be found [here](#), and you can view the conference schedule [here](#).

### Transportation Research Board Annual Meeting - A Virtual Event

Committee Meetings: January 5–8 and 11–15  
Sessions & Exhibits: January 21–22 and 25–29  
For more information about this conference, click [here](#).



### National Safety Council Congress & EXPO

Date: March 1-5, 2021  
For more information about this conference, click [here](#).



Professional Development Seminars  
March 1-2  
Congress & Expo  
March 3-5

### National Association of County Engineers - Annual Conference 2021

Date: April 19-22, 2021

For more information about this conference, click [here](#).



## What's Hot Off the Press?

### National Association of Development Organizations Releases Several Rural and Small Metropolitan ITS Case Studies

The report presents [case studies](#) highlighting the work of state, regional, local, and nonprofit agencies using ITS in rural, small metropolitan, and suburban or exurban places around the United States.



### RTZ - Doubling Down on What Works

The Road to Zero has released a new webpage that looks to put tools and resources into the hands of practitioners from one central place. Check it out [here](#).



### FHWA Curve Signing Series

New! FHWA has posted a new [curve signing series](#) on YouTube.



### CDC Releases New Tribal Fact Sheets

CDC recently released [fact sheets](#) about Tribal Road Safety and how to reduce crash-related injuries and deaths. The fact sheets focus on restraint use, child passenger safety, alcohol-impaired driving and safety driving in tribal communities.



### CDC Releases New Drug-Impaired Driving and Data Linkage Fact Sheets

CDC recently released fact sheets about [drug-impaired driving](#) and [data linkage for non-fatal crash injury surveillance](#). The fact sheets present strategies like high-visibility enforcement, data linkage programs, and what other states are doing to address drug-impaired driving.



### FHWA EDC-6 Initiatives Launch

If you missed the September 23, 2020 **FHWA Executive Session to Launch the EDC-6 initiatives**, here is the direct link to the [recording](#).



### FHWA Intersection Safety Video

The [Principles of Intersection Safety](#) video has been posted to the YouTube. This video explains the three basic factors for intersection safety (conflict points, vehicle speed and collision angle) and how they correspond to innovative intersection designs.



### Roadwise Rx



Use [this tool](#) from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety to understand how medications may affect you and your driving. Medications have both intended and unintended effects on your body, and these effects change based on the other medications that you're taking and the foods that you eat. Not only does that affect how you feel, many of these effects can also impact your ability to safely drive.



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