

Session 2: Safer Road Users in the Rural Context

Applying the Safe System Approach for Rural
1/2 Day Virtual, Mini-Conference
January 28, 2026





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Session 2 Presenters



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National Center for Rural Road Safety

A Federal Highway Administration Center for Excellence





COUNTRY ROADS, SAFELY HOME

Strategies for Saving Lives
on Rural Roads

Hi! I'm Brandy

and I grew up in
Rural Pennsylvania ...







Why Rural Roads?



Why Rural Roads?

In Virginia:

Half of all fatal crashes occurred on rural non -interstate roads in 2024

... although only a **quarter of vehicle miles** were traveled there.



Why Rural Crashes are So Deadly

- Riskier Driving Behaviors
- Simpler Road Design
- Longer Emergency Response Time

Risky Behaviors

Speed

46%

Unbelted

52%

Alcohol

37%

Demographics

In 2024:

3-in-4 people who died in rural,
non-interstate crashes were **male**

- 1-in-4 of those were **males**
20-34
- Another 1-in-4 were **males**
65+



Insights from Rural Resident Surveys and Focus Groups

- Speeding ID'd as most concerning behavior
- Cell phone use is rampant
- Residents see themselves as safe drivers, but downplay risks of unsafe behaviors



Country Roads, Safely Home

3-Year Goal

Reduce rural fatalities by

10%

455 in 2024 to 410 in 2027



Rural
COMMUNITY COALITIONS



High-Impact Projects in the Works

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PROMISING PRACTICES FOR PREVENTING IMPAIRED DRIVING IN RURAL AREAS

Jennifer Symoun, PMP

toXcel

Scientific Excellence to Serve Others

AGENDA

- Background
- Methodology
- Examples of Promising Practices
- Key Themes

BACKGROUND

BACKGROUND: TASK ORDER OBJECTIVE

To identify and describe promising practices to prevent impaired driving in rural areas of the U.S.

Task order involved:

- Reviewing secondary data to understand the rural impaired driving problem.
- Conducting a program scan to identify promising practices.
- Collecting more information and documenting promising practices through stakeholder interviews.
- Drafting a report to describe the findings.

METHODOLOGY

IDENTIFY PROMISING PRACTICES

- Conduct a review of programs and initiatives to prevent impaired driving in rural areas across the United States, and identify:
 - Innovative approaches, program goals, and how they were tailored to address local needs.
 - Key partners and collaborative relationships that expanded program reach.
- Types of sources:
 - Internet search
 - Conference materials
 - Expert panel

PROMISING PRACTICES

- Local or Regional Impaired Driving Task Forces
- Tribal Motor Vehicle Injury Prevention Programs
- Low-Manpower Sobriety Checkpoints
- Multijurisdictional Sobriety Checkpoints
- State Tribal Collaboration Act
- Rural DWI Court Programs
- Intensive Supervision Programs
- 24/7 Sobriety Programs
- Holistic Approach
- Key Messages about Drug-Impaired Driving in Rural and Remote Areas
- Alternative Transportation (cabs, Uber, Lyft, public transportation, etc.)
- Alcohol Ignition Interlocks
- Reduce Teen Crashes Web Programs
- Social Host Campaigns
- Responsible Beverage Service Training

COLLECT INFORMATION AND DOCUMENT PROMISING PRACTICES

- Conducted interviews with points of contact for 7 programs to develop summaries of program examples.
- Used existing literature to develop summary for 1 program and fill gaps in other case studies.

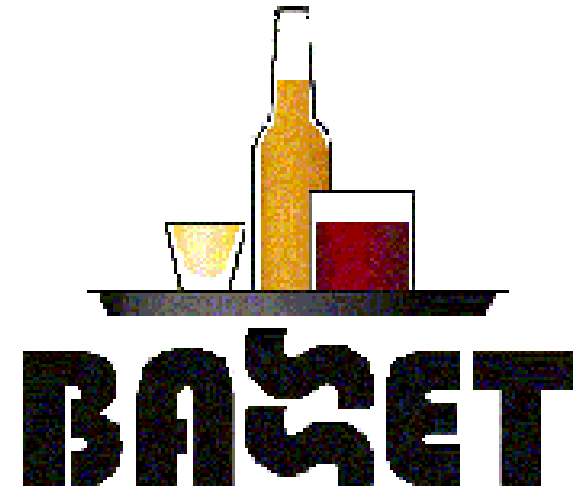
PROGRAMS SELECTED AND KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- **BASSET: Responsible Beverage Service Training in Illinois** - Lee Roupas, Illinois Liquor Control Commission.
- **Michigan's Regional DWI Court Program** - Honorable Patrick Bowler, Statewide Judicial Outreach Liaison.
- **Parents Who Host Lose the Most** - Jodi Salvo, Director of Substance Use Prevention Services, OhioGuidestone & Coordinator, Empower Tusc.
- **Reduce TN Crashes** - Joseph Powell, Associate Director, & Stephanie Scarborough, Manager of iCube, Tennessee Tech University.
- **Safe Cab of Isanti County, Minnesota** - Loren Davis, Board Chair.
- **San Carlos Apache Tribal Motor Vehicle Injury Program in Arizona** – Unable to make contact with anyone, used information found online.
- **South Dakota's 24/7 Sobriety Program** - Dr. Beau Kilmer McCauley Chair in Drug Policy Innovation; Director, RAND Drug Policy Research Center.
- **Western North Carolina (WNC) Regional DWI Task Force** - Ellen Pitt, Chair and Head of the WNC chapter of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD).

EXAMPLES OF PROMISING PRACTICES

BASSET: RESPONSIBLE BEVERAGE SERVICE TRAINING IN ILLINOIS

- Designed to encourage profitable, responsible, and legal alcohol sales and service.
- Goals:
 - Train and educate sellers and servers to engage in responsible alcohol service.
 - Spot signs of intoxication and utilize various intervention techniques.
 - Prevent DUIs and alcohol-related fatalities.
 - Stop underage sales and underage drinking.
 - Create safer communities and establishments where alcohol is served.
 - Educate owners, managers and staff on insurance, state laws, and local ordinances regarding alcohol service.
- Became a Statewide requirement for on-premise establishments in July 2015 through Public Act 99-0046.
- Outcomes: BASSET educated managers and servers come away well-equipped to do their job and assist in the effort to reduce impaired driving.



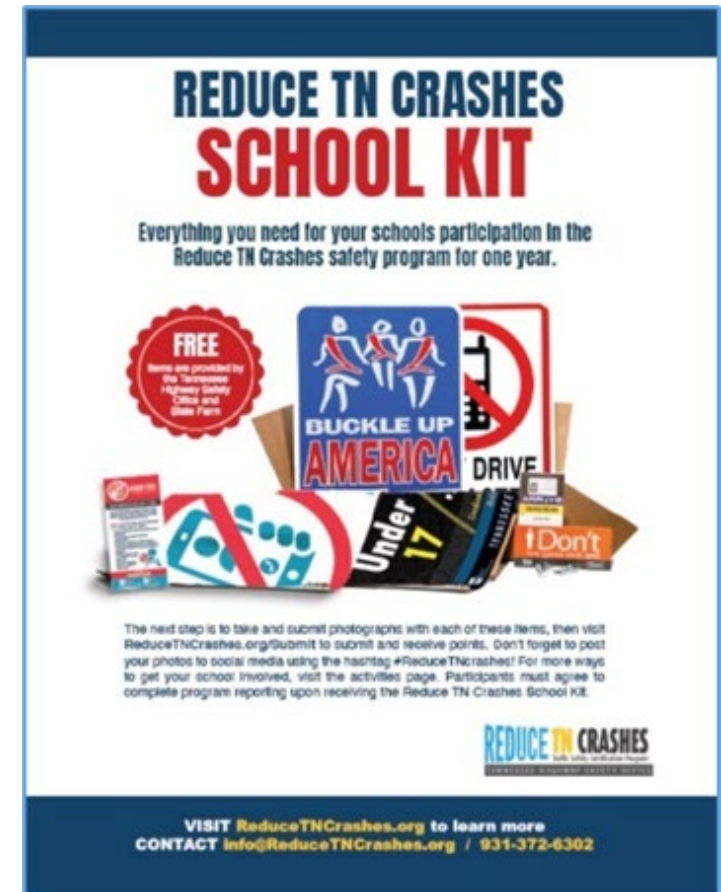
PARENTS WHO HOST LOSE THE MOST: SOCIAL HOST CAMPAIGN IN TUSCARAWAS COUNTY, OHIO

- Designed to educate parents about the dangers of serving alcoholic beverages to minors.
- Campaign involves placing a wide array of outreach materials throughout community.
- Goals:
 - Raise awareness about the legality of social hosting for parents and underage drinking for youth.
 - Educate parents about the issues and impacts of underage drinking.
 - Build capacity in the coalition.
 - Change community norms around alcohol.
- Outcomes: The program has been successful in generating conversations and awareness among families.



REDUCE TN CRASHES: TEEN EDUCATION PROGRAM IN TENNESSEE

- Crash prevention and alcohol awareness program that teaches teens in Tennessee about the dangers of drinking and driving and other risky driving behaviors.
- Modeled after NHTSA best practices: saturation, involvement, and outreach
- Fosters competition among schools by assigning points for completing hands-on learning opportunities for students throughout the year.
 - 79 activities available on the web site, most utilizing free resources.
 - Schools typically complete 7-12 activities per year.
- Goal: Reduce traffic crashes by increasing traffic safety activities.
- Schools in rural counties account for the majority of participation in the program.
- Outcomes: Reduce TN Crashes has resulted in over 900 activities in over 190 schools in all 95 counties in Tennessee.



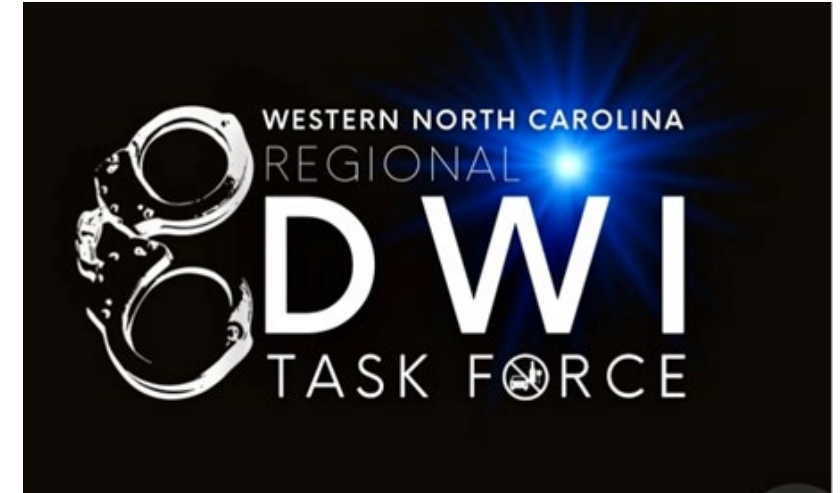
SAFECAB: SAFE TRANSPORTATION IN ISANTI COUNTY, MINNESOTA

- Championed by local judge who tracked “last place of drink.”
- Goal: Reduce the number of citations for DWI within rural Isanti, Chisago, Pine and Kanabec counties by:
 - Partnering with local taxi companies, bars, and restaurants to offer safe rides home to patrons.
 - Working with alcohol establishments to reduce over-selling alcohol to patrons who have had enough to drink and to encourage their patrons to use the SafeCab service.
 - Collaborating with law enforcement to ensure patrons’ vehicles are safe and do not get ticketed when left overnight.
- Outcomes: From 2005 to 2021, DWIs in Isanti County dropped by 70%.



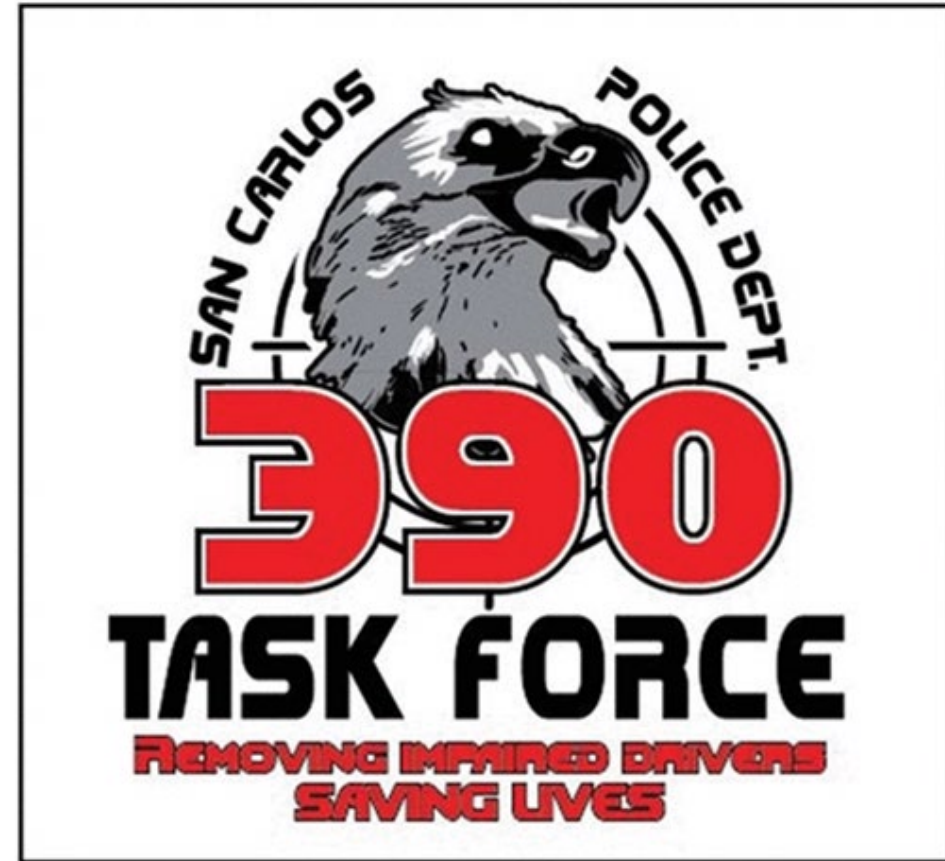
WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA DWI TASK FORCE

- Consists of over 30 cross-disciplinary members that include victims, advocates, district attorneys, police officers, prosecutors, representatives from the wildlife resources commission, fraternal order of police, and law makers.
- Goal: Develop and implement a comprehensive, achievable strategy to reduce impaired driving within 7 counties in Western North Carolina.
- Core activities:
 - Advocate for policy change.
 - Draw attention to county conviction rates.
 - Raise awareness of the impacts of DWIs.
- Outcomes: Success in securing funding and advocacy wins.



SAN CARLOS APACHE TRIBAL MOTOR VEHICLE INJURY PREVENTION PROGRAM IN ARIZONA

- Employed a multidisciplinary approach and leveraged strong partnerships among public health, law enforcement, and the tribal community.
- Goal: Decrease alcohol-impaired driving and increase restraint use in Tribal areas.
- Initial strategies focused on high-visibility sobriety checkpoints accompanied by an awareness-raising mass media campaign.
- Outcomes: Resulted in policy changes lowering BAC legal limit from 0.10% to 0.08% and establishing a primary occupant restraint law for the Reservation.



REGIONAL DWI COURT PROGRAM IN MICHIGAN

- Problem-solving court that crosses jurisdictional boundaries to work to address the substance use disorders of nonviolent offenders.
- Goal: Allow rural communities to access the DWI courts and thereby expand the availability of Michigan's Ignition Interlock Pilot Program.
- Interventions to reduce the likelihood of re-offense by providing repeat DWI and High Blood Alcohol Content offenders the tools to work on their substance use disorders:
 - Intensive judicial supervision.
 - Treatment.
 - Sanctions.
 - Incentives.
 - Drug and alcohol testing.
- Outcomes:
 - 70% completion rate.
 - Approximately 98.2% of interlock program participants complied with orders to install interlock devices.

24/7 SOBRIETY PROGRAM IN SOUTH DAKOTA

- Targets repeat offenders by offering alcohol and drug testing as an alternative to jail time through:
 - Drug and alcohol testing program for repeat offenders who have previously committed alcohol or drug related crimes, in particular DWIs.
 - Requirement of alcohol and drug abstinence.
- Goals:
 - Reduce rates of short and long-term recidivism rates related to alcohol or drug abuse.
 - Support more offenders to change their behaviors related to drug and alcohol abuse and stop re-offending.
 - Provide an alternative to incarceration through community-based supervision.
 - Allow offenders to continue to live and work in their community.
 - Improve public safety.
- Outcomes:
 - Strong evidence that program participation reduced criminal activity at 12 months after the initial arrest, and potentially longer term.
 - Lower rates of DWI and drug-related crimes.

KEY THEMES

SUCCESS FACTORS

- Understanding and responding to the needs and culture of the community where the program is to be implemented.
- Developing strong partnerships.
- Considering resources available and what partners can bring to the table.
- Starting small.
- Assessing the effectiveness of the program.

GUIDANCE FOR STATE AND LOCAL JURISDICTIONS

- **Engage your State's Highway Safety Office (SHSO).**
- **Understand what laws and regulations** are in place in the locality where you serve, and how they might apply to the program being considered.
- **Judicial application of laws and release conditions.** Not all judges or magistrates may know about or have confidence in certain sentencing conditions (e.g., alcohol ignition interlocks or alcohol monitoring bracelets).
- **Consider systems changes.** Think about systemic and policy levers that can be changed or more uniformly implemented to strengthen a locality's response to DWIs.

STEPS FOR ACTION

- Use data to describe the problem.
- Bring the data to life.
- Take the time to get the buy-in needed.
- Involve key stakeholders in the planning process.
- Assess best and promising practices.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Jaime Sullivan, Director, National Center for Rural Road Safety.
- Stephanie Manning, Chief Government Affairs Officer, MADD.
- Katrina McCarthy, Evaluation & Research Senior Associate, CADCA.
- Jill Hylla, Alcohol Programs, Wright County Public Health; Fatal Review Committee, Safe Communities of Wright County, Minnesota.
- Ellen Walston, Western County Regional Task Force, North Carolina Vision Zero.
- Chief Bob Ticer, Prescott Valley Police Department, Arizona.
- Kenny Benfield, Forensic Tests for Alcohol Branch and DRE Instructor, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services.
- Additional sources of information: IACP, GHSA, AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, former TRB: Standing Committees on Traffic Law Enforcement (ANB40) and on Impairment in Transportation (ACS50)

FINAL REPORT

Resources to Prevent Impaired Driving in Rural Areas (DOT HS 813 674) - <https://rosap.ntl.bts.gov/view/dot/82532>

- Highlights examples of the promising practices.
 - Program overview and goals.
 - Program development and initiation.
 - Leadership/champions and partners.
 - Program finances: costs and funding.
 - Successes, challenges, and lessons learned.
- Identifies themes across promising practices.
 - Success factors.
 - Guidance for State and local jurisdiction.
 - Steps for action.

QUESTIONS?

THANK YOU

Framing a Safe System

The Role of Language in Fostering Safer Rural
Communities

Session 2: Safer Road Users in the Rural Context

Seth LaJeunesse

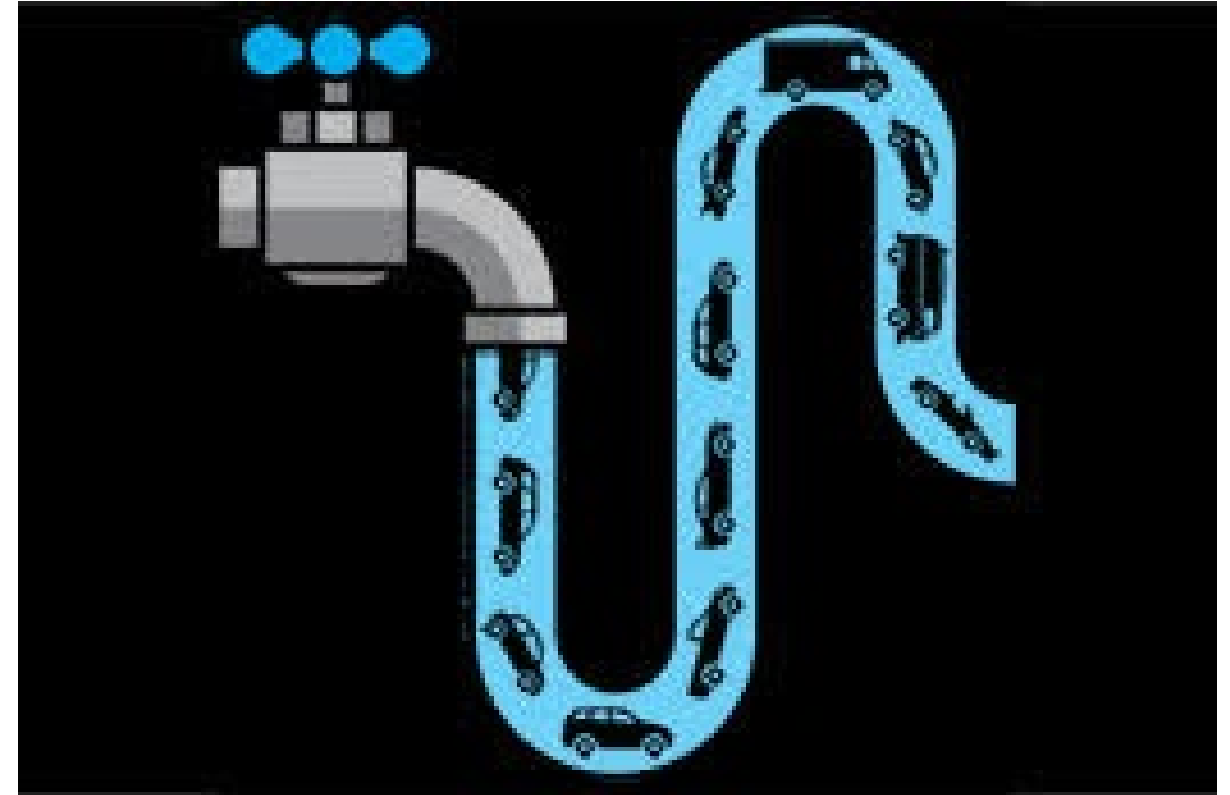


www.hsrc.unc.edu

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Premises

- People care deeply about safety, freedom, and looking out for one another.
- Yet transportation is often described in terms of **metaphors**—like traffic as water (*flow, congestion*) or roads as akin to arteries (as in *arterial*) that quietly steer us toward speed, volume, and expansion rather than safety.

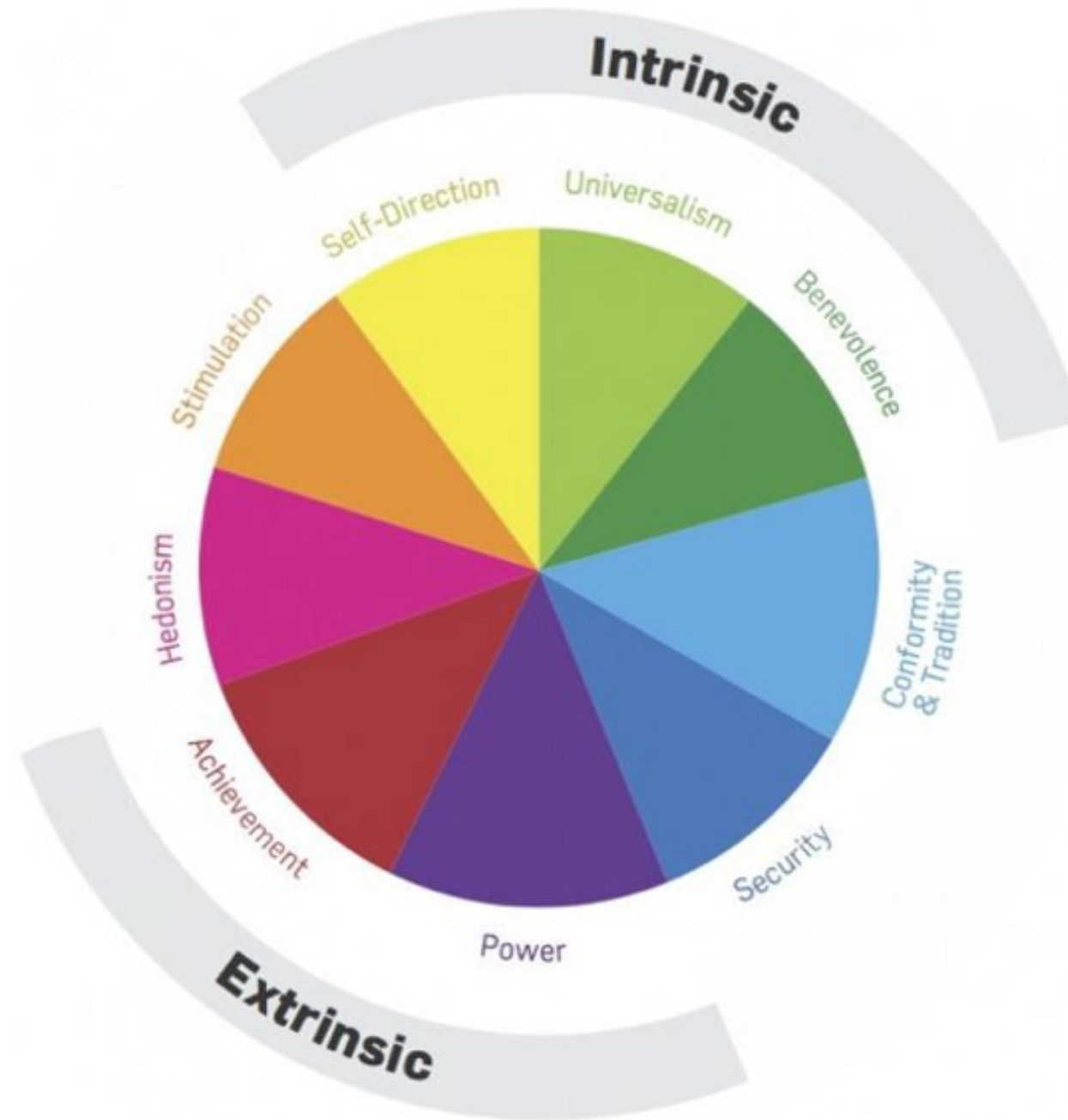


Source: [wsj.com/articles/going-with-the-flow-of-traffic-1541612159?page=1&pos=4](https://www.wsj.com/articles/going-with-the-flow-of-traffic-1541612159?page=1&pos=4)

The role of language and frames in our world

- Language doesn't just describe transportation problems—it defines what counts as a problem and what solutions seem reasonable.
- When crashes are framed as individual mistakes, systemic fixes are ignored.
- When danger is framed as having been designed, prevention becomes possible and desirable.

This brings us to human values



How do values work?

- Values are universal and mentally arranged in a “circumplex”
- Values **near each other** in the circle **enhance each other** (the “spill-over effect”)
- Values on **opposite sides** of the circle **suppress each other** (the “see-saw effect”)
- Like muscles, values are **strengthened** when they are engaged

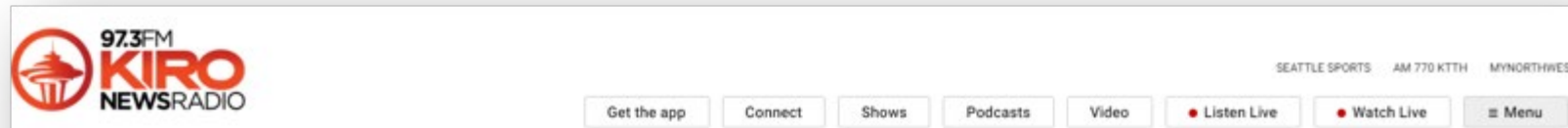


Source: Schwartz, S. H. (2012). An Overview of the Schwartz Theory of Basic Values. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 2, Retrieved from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1116>

How do values work?

- Values guide how we evaluate what is good, fair, worth pursuing.
- When safety investments activate widely shared values—like **stewardship, competence, and care for neighbors**—they feel *practical rather than political*.

Common crash stories – which values do these engage?



I-5 south vehicle crash that killed pedestrian snarled traffic near Marysville

Mar 3, 2024, 7:17 PM | Updated: Mar 4, 2024, 1:00 am



abc 24

News Weather Sport

Snowy roads cause multiple crashes and traffic delays in Louisville, southern Indiana

WDRB Digital Staff Jan 14, 2026 | Updated Jan 16, 2026



One person injured in crash along I-240 at Getwell Rd., causing traffic delays

A brief introduction to message framing

- Language frames shape our understanding of reality, emphasizing some aspects—including values!—while obscuring or neglecting other aspects.
- Example: the "estate tax" became the "death tax"
- Example: "the pedestrian was wearing dark clothing when he was struck" vs. "the crash, the 5th on this rural road in a month, occurred in an area without good lighting."



Source: researchgate.net/figure/Insufficient-light-on-the-road-at-night_fig1_349365835

Framing Techniques

First, what framing is not

- Framing ≠ Education or “Voluntary Action Appeals”
- Voluntary Action Appeal: “Be the Driver Who Saves Lives”



Source: txdot.gov/safety/traffic-safety-campaigns.html

Goal framing: Gain v. Loss

- Describing the consequences of an action (or inaction) in terms of positive or negative outcomes.
- "investing in bike infrastructure leads to a healthier population" vs.
- "failure to invest in bike infrastructure leads to a less healthy population."



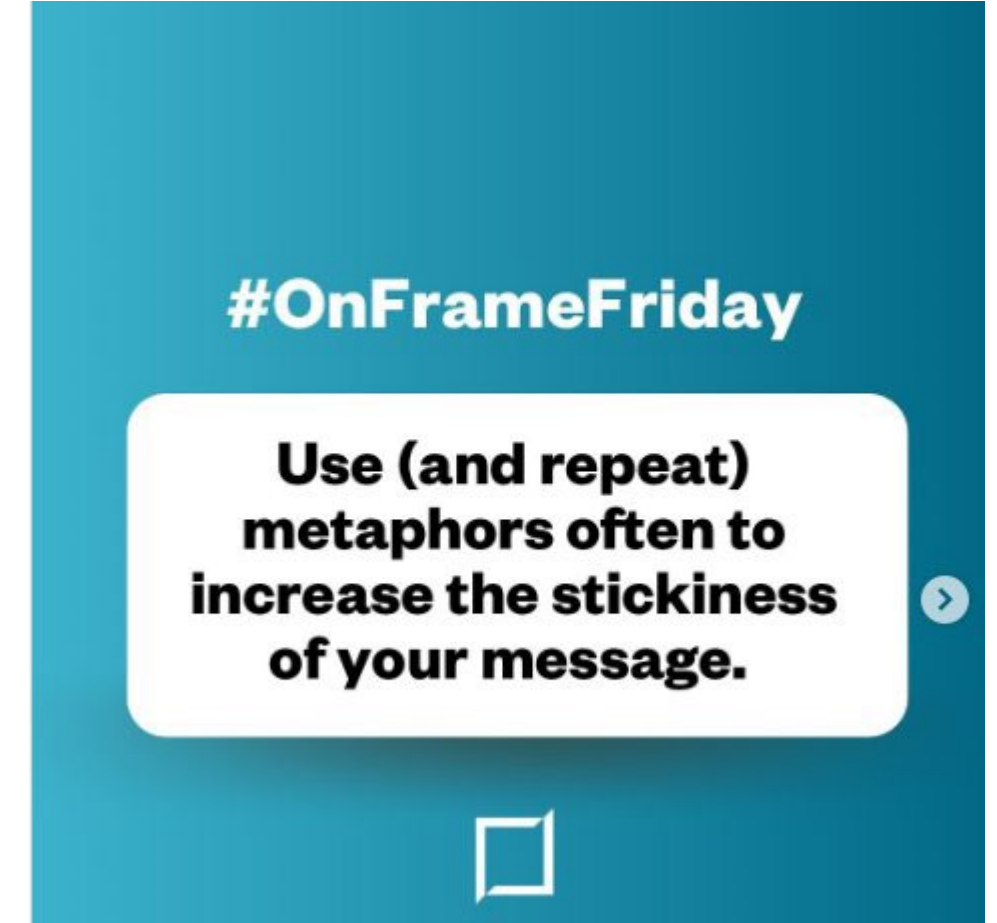
Source: marketingmind.in/5-types-of-framing-effects-in-marketing/

Order

- Changing the order of a set of items in a list (e.g., “A, B, C” vs. “C, B, A”); the first item often **anchors people’s evaluation of the set**.
- Example: When presented with a set of traits about another person, participants who heard a ***positive trait first*** endorsed more positive descriptors of the person than those who heard a negative trait first (J. Sullivan, 2019).

Metaphor

- Describing a target issue metaphorically, often in terms of a concrete or experiential domain.
- Example: “Police officers are warriors” vs. “Police officers are guardians”



Source: frameworksinstitute.org/

Lexical Frames

- Words assign responsibility.
- Reducing 'road danger' points us toward design and policy.
- Calling people 'vulnerable' hides the systems that endanger them.



Source: usa.streetsblog.org/2014/10/16/qa-with-peter-norton-history-is-on-the-side-of-vision-zero

Pronoun

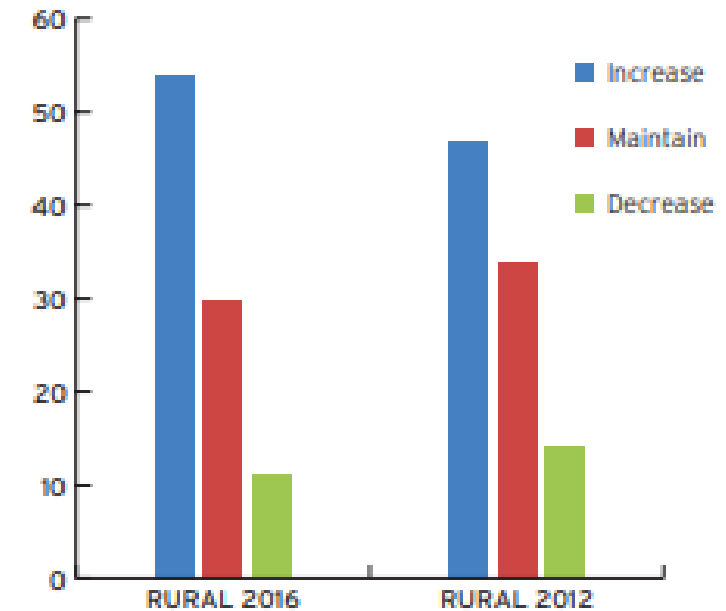
- Describing a situation using different pronouns that communicate different levels of psychological distance.
- Use a broad, generous **“we”** and **“us”** when articulating the need to prevent or address a problem. For example, rather than articulating what older adults need, speak **“what we all need as we age.”**



Source: census.gov/library/stories/2019/10/older-population-in-rural-america.html

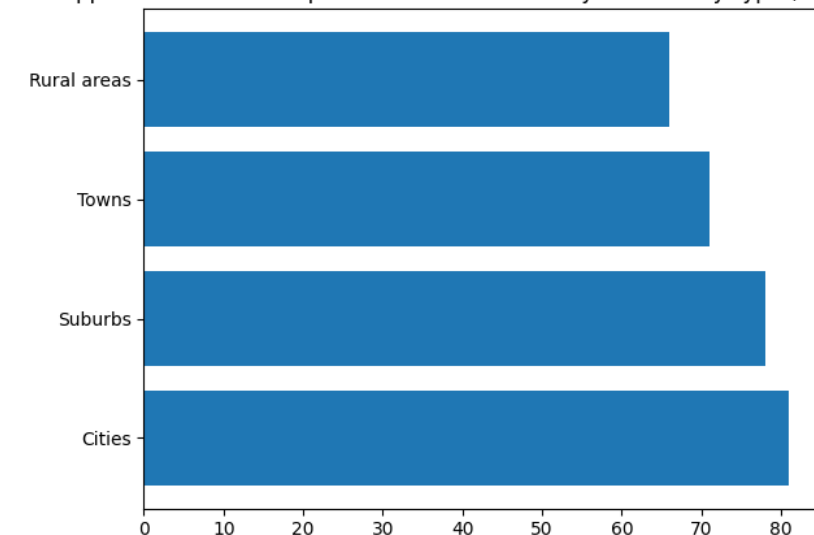
Dynamic Norms

- People are more open to change when they believe others are changing too.
- In 2012, **47%** of rural residents in the U.S. supported increasing infrastructure for biking and walking; in 2016 support jumped to **54%** in favor of more biking and walking infrastructure. Then, in 2025, **66%** of rural residents supported active transportation infrastructure investment.
- Showing that support for safer, communities with mobility options is growing reduces fear of being the outlier.



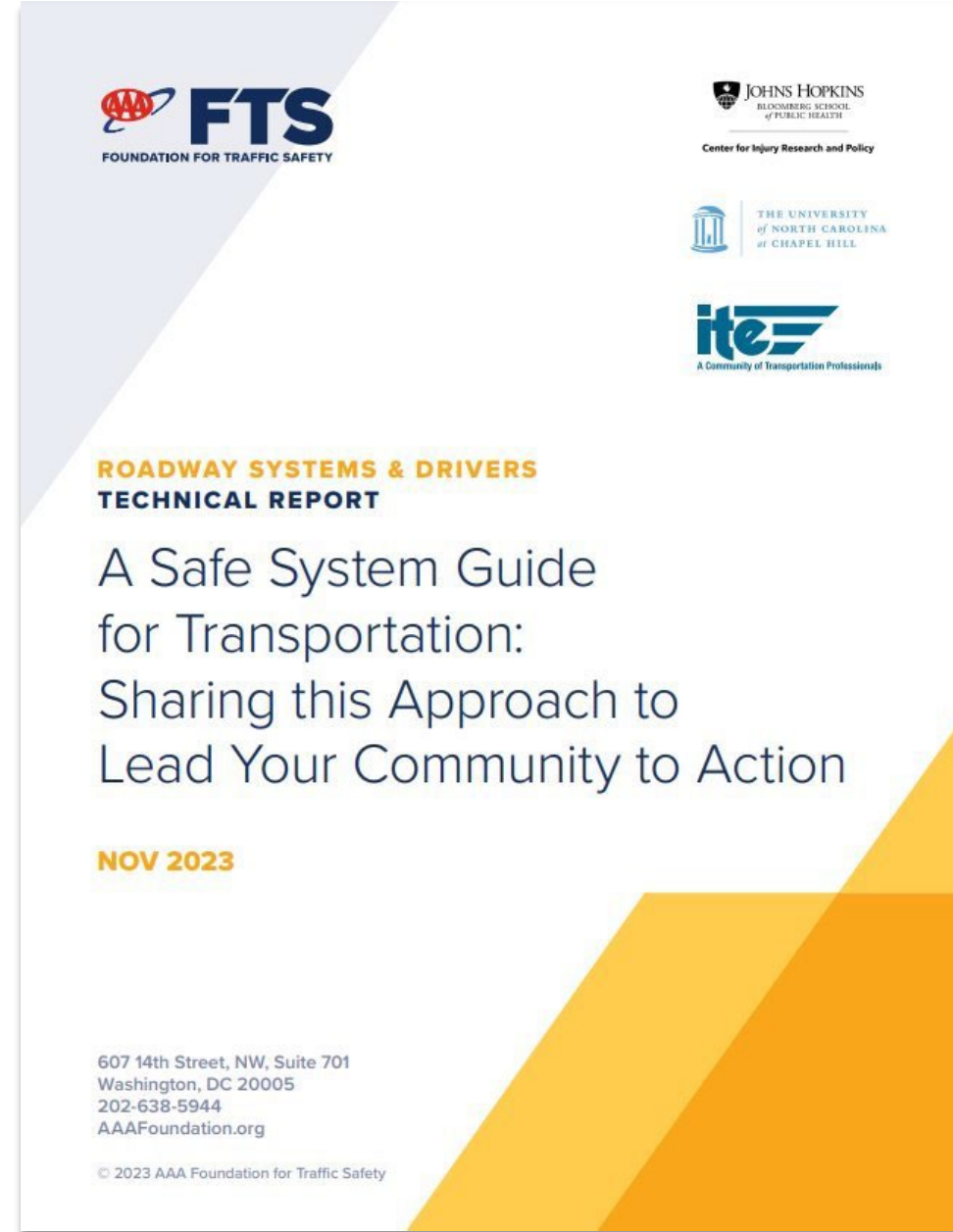
Source: bikeleague.org/sites/default/files/2016_Polling_Data.pdf

Support for Active Transportation Infrastructure by Community Type (U.S., 2025)



Source: today.yougov.com/travel/articles/52404-three-quarters-of-americans-support-bike-lanes

A Safe System Framing Guide



Available: aaafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/202311-AAAFTS-Safe-System-Approach.pdf

Method: focused literature review

- Public support for robust policies tends to increase when policies are framed as...
 - capable of effectively addressing complex problems
 - broadly popular, ambitious, and publicly monitored
 - addressing the health consequences of the problem and emphasize the responsibility of institutions rather than individuals
 - advancing immediate non-economic (e.g., health, environmental) opportunities

Method: Focus groups

- The team conducted 9 focus groups with an average of 7 traffic safety experts per group.
 - 4 of the groups included personnel from AAA offices.
 - 5 of the groups included front-line safety professionals representing public safety, public health, safety advocacy, road authorities, and academia.



Source: itracks.com/blog/the-benefits-of-using-virtual-backrooms-during-online-focus-groups/

Results: barriers and needs related to Safe System implementation

The focus group discussions with AAA personnel suggested that barriers to Safe System implementation may include:

- Limited public awareness and understanding of key Safe System approach principles
- A lack of political and social priority to invest in safety
- An unwillingness to take political risks



The needs identified to address these barriers included:

- Guidance on techniques to effectively communicate the magnitude and urgency of the national road injury crisis
- Brief, accessible explanations on how robust transportation safety policies and engineering interventions work and benefit specific communities
- Framing of messages that would resonate with diverse audiences

Values-Solutions-Action messaging framework

Step 1: Identify the connections between pro-social *values* and the Safe System vision.



Step 2: Use these connections to explain the benefits of planned Safe System *solutions*.



Step 3: Suggest *action* that will demonstrate community support for Safe System improvements.

Identify the connections between pro-social values and the Safe System vision

- General frames: Stewardship, competence, looking out for neighbors
 - Example: “A Safe System doesn’t assume people are careless. It assumes everyone is human and makes sure one mistake doesn’t cost a life.”



Source: www.britannica.com/topic/Blue-Ridge-Parkway

Use these connections to explain the benefits of planned Safe System solutions

- General frames: Roads that forgive, tools that back us up
 - Example: “Rural roads are some of the most important shared tools a community has. Let’s take care of those tools so they don’t turn against us.”



Source: wikipedia.org/wiki/File:MMLNorr1.JPG

Suggest action that will demonstrate community support for Safe System improvements

- General frames: Support locally chosen improvements
 - Example: “Let’s share with others our support for the community-chosen design of safe and useful roads, ones that invite us to use them in a variety of ways, whether it be driving, walking, biking, or rolling.”



Talkeetna, AK (Population: 1,199) | Source: Wiki user Photographer is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.

Source: wordpress.smartgrowthamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/SGA-Rural-Transportation-Field-Scan_Final_7.27.pdf

Parting thoughts

- Let's show people **what a truly Safe System is**, rather than what it isn't.
- Let's use a generous “we” and “us” when talking about making improvements, as they impact each of us.
- Let's inspire “can-doism” by emphasizing that getting to a Safe System is possible and would benefit all of us.

Thank you; Let's connect

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