

## **Breakout 15: Emerging Traffic Safety Issues**

*Moderator:* Quinn Brackett, Center for Transportation Safety, TTI

### Session Summary:

This was an eclectic session dealing with promising countermeasures that are not currently used in Texas, new traffic safety concepts, and the changing economic environment and its impact on safety. Each of the topics is of vital interest if we are to improve traffic safety in the state beyond the diminishing utility that currently limits the magnitude of crash reductions.

Mike Quintana, from the New Mexico Traffic Safety Bureau, discussed Highway Safety Corridors. These corridors are segments of roadway that are experiencing significant problems with driver behavior (DWI, speeding, heavy truck crashes, aggressive driving, etc.) The corridors are the focus of saturated law enforcement efforts coupled with signs designating the segment as a corridor and local media attention. Fundamental to the concept is the grass roots initiative to request that the state designate a road segment as a Safety Corridor and the commitment of local and county government and law enforcement agencies. New Mexico began implementing the Highway Safety Corridor concept beginning in FY2001. Since that time, the roadways designated have experienced an average 25% reduction in serious crashes.

Anne O’Ryan, AAA-Texas, provided a presentation on AAA’s Traffic Safety Culture Index. The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety has been instrumental in advancing the Traffic Safety Culture concept. The concept is based on the need for future safety efforts to be based on a paradigm shift in the driving culture in the US. The cultural shift is intended to raise the consciousness of the driving public and public officials concerning the importance of traffic safety policies and personal responsibility in the driving environment. As a benchmark measure, AAA commissioned a survey of the driving public to assess current perceptions about driving. This survey formed the basis of what is called a Traffic Safety Culture Index. The results show that, in general, the driving public, as individuals perceive that safety is important, but that the responsibility for crashes should be attributed to drivers other than themselves. Further, when asked about specific behaviors that they might have participated in, such as speeding and driving after drinking, the majority of respondents acknowledged having done so. Drivers apparently recognize those behaviors as being a potential problem for other drivers but not for themselves. It is anticipated that the survey will be conducted periodically so that it will provide an index of the Traffic Safety Cultural shift over time.

TTI’s Dr. David Ellis discussed *Gasoline Consumption, VMT and Price: Does Price Really Matter?* The dramatic rise in gasoline price over the course of the 2008 summer months and the associated decline in vehicle miles traveled (VMT) was put in perspective by posing the change in terms of drivers and households. Individual drivers are driving about 0.83 miles less per day or 2.61 miles less per household and spending about \$.45 less in fuel per household per day. The price of fuel has not dramatically affected travel to and from work but has probably had an impact on the discretionary driving that usually takes place in the summer months. This type of reduction in travel

has happened in past years. It remains to be seen if it will continue as more fuel efficient vehicles rise in numbers in the vehicle fleet. In any case, a strong argument can be made for indexing the fuel tax, so that infrastructure and traffic safety projects continue to be viable.