

### **Breakout 3: Young Drivers**

*Moderator:* Tracie Mendez, Texas Department of Transportation

#### Session Summary:

The intent of the three presenters in this session was to cover a variety of issues related to the safety and proficiency of young drivers. The leading cause of teen injury and deaths at the state, national and global levels, car crashes and the role of teens in these crashes has seen unprecedented attention in recent years. This increased attention has helped facilitate new research and insights into the scope of the problem and the role that various elements of young driver education play in current young driver mortality rates. In addition, new solutions for improving awareness of related risk factors and young driver performance have come to the forefront as prospective approaches to decreasing crash rates for this age group. This session included presentations on current driver education practices, related policies, and the potential role that teens themselves can play in reducing the frequency with which they are involved in car crashes.

Formal driver education has been increasingly scrutinized in recent years, based largely upon the fact that decades of research show no clear connection between driver education and reduced crash rates among young/novice drivers. Jessica Hartos of the University of North Carolina's Department of Public Health Sciences provided an overview of recent research examining ways in which driver education could be changed in order to better reflect the needs of today's young drivers. The Delphi Method used in this research entailed a long series of survey and feedback sessions with leading national experts in the field of driver education. The results included a list of key elements that should be emphasized in any driver education curriculum and training activities for young drivers.

Texas is one of only a handful of states that formally recognizes parent-taught driver education as an approved, state-sanctioned source of training for teens obtaining a driver's license. In his presentation on the role of parents in the training of young novice drivers, Val Pezoldt provided an overview of a research project that closely examined the impacts of parent-taught driving instruction on teen crash rates in Texas. The study concluded that teens receiving parent-taught driver education and training (solely) were, in general, more likely to be involved in crashes and that the likelihood of crash involvement among parent-taught young drivers was greater than among those completing traditional driver education courses, especially involvement in the most severe crashes. Ideas for improving related policies were offered as sources for prospective improvements in parent-taught driving application(s) in Texas.

The Teens in the Driver Seat (TDS) Program, started in 2003 by TTI, has been growing rapidly in Texas. Robert Wunderlich of the City of Garland Texas discussed the adoption and deployment of this program in the Garland Independent School District (ISD), one of the largest ISDs in Texas. This currently stands as the only instance in which an entire large school district has chosen to deploy the TDS Program in all of its high schools -- in this case, seven high schools in the City of Garland. As such, it is the

most concentrated localized deployment of the program to date. Mr. Wunderlich's presentation provided an overview of the process and partnering activities involved in accomplishing this deployment. In addition, data that summarize the impact of the TDS Program on teen driving in this community were provided. In the four years prior to TDS Program deployment, the City of Garland lost 12 teens in car crashes and teens were involved in 28% of all crashes. During the two years since the TDS Program has been active (2006 to present), only one teen has died in a car crash in Garland and teens have been involved in 16% of all crashes.