



## Focus on Safety

### **Vermont Strategic Highway Safety Program Activities June 13, 2008**

The *Vermont Strategic Highway Safety Plan* (SHSP) has been in place since December 2006. The SHSP initiative uses a collaborative approach in statewide planning and includes over 100 participants from both the public and private sector. The SHSP is now in its implementation phase using “out-of-the-box” approaches along with standard practices to achieve the goal of reducing serious and fatal injury crashes by 25% by 2012.

The SHSP program is organized around four functional areas that address the following components of highway safety:

- Transportation infrastructure
- Law compliance and enforcement
- Outreach and training
- Legislation to support the above functions

Committees representing several agencies and the private sector manage each functional area and are responsible for reporting progress. Progress in the four functional areas is as follows:

#### Infrastructure:

- Developed a program to implement low cost safety improvements on local road systems.

Five regional one-day workshops were held in the spring of 2007 to provide low-cost safety improvement guidance to municipalities and VTrans District staff. As a result, thirty-six road safety audit reviews (RSAR) were conducted on town highways. The RSARs identified potential low-cost safety improvements that the municipality could implement. Twenty-two sites were selected for signing improvement for curves to reduce run-off-the-road crashes. Where sign improvements were identified, signs and posts were provided to the municipality for its installation using federal High Risk Rural Roads funding. Implementations are underway.

- Provide edge line or centerline rumble strips.

Properly located rumble stripes alert drivers and give them time to take corrective action to stay in their lane. VTrans and the RPC selected a six-mile test site for centerline rumble stripes on VT 105 for construction in the summer of 2008.

- Improve roadside geometry by eliminating shoulder drop-offs, and providing safer side slopes and ditches

Steep shoulder drop-offs may cause drivers to over-steer when attempting to re-enter the travel lane from the shoulder. That, in turn, may cause them to head into oncoming traffic. VTrans proposed a new construction standard for paving that calls for angled safety edges. It is expected to be implemented in the 2008 or 2009 construction season.

- Provided interactive signing that warns side-road drivers of approaching mainline vehicles at an intersection in Castleton. After evaluation for effectiveness, we plan to install similar signs at other high-crash intersections.
- Developed a program for funding signs and pavement markings on town highways in conjunction with Class 2 paving program. This includes both roadway and intersection traffic control. Implementation has begun.
- Completed construction of safety projects in Swanton (I-89 ramps/VT 78), Franklin (VT 120/VT 236), Hinesburg (VT 116/Charlotte Rd). Continued development of plans for intersection safety projects in Barre Town, Barre City, Hinesburg, Rutland, and Wilmington. Construction will be underway in 2008 for some of these.
- Implement a local program for identifying and prioritizing High Crash intersections. The Regional Planning Commissions will develop local prioritization process as part of their FFY 08 work program.
- Installed an anti-icing and anti-skid pavement overlay in Searsburg.

### Outreach & Training:

Outreach and Training is an essential element in reducing crashes by changing driver habits and driver knowledge. Outreach and Training strategies in the SHSP are:

- Remedial driver education course
- Teen driver essential skills
- Improvement of initial driver education

The Outreach and Training Functional Group has met every four to six weeks to review the status of the Critical Emphasis Area strategies assigned to them. The group is developing detailed plans to address these strategies including funding and possible legislation that might be required. Specific activities include:

- The group developed a proposal for a Remedial Driver Education Program called *Driver Attitudes and Essential Skills Training*. The program, as proposed, includes a classroom session that targets driver attitude and behavior and emphasizes choices, responsibility and consequences. The group investigated a similar program in New Hampshire while developing the proposal. (Wherever possible the SHSP members try to learn from experiences in other states.)
- The group plans to start a speakers forum tentatively titled, "Circles for Safety", to make highway safety presentations throughout the state to various groups especially

teen groups. In the past month one member made presentations to two insurance organizations focusing on seat belt use and teen driving programs.

- AAA has recently introduced a new program, “Dare to Prepare”. The program is a pre-permitting class designed to address various teen highway safety issues with parents, teens and highway safety advocates. Their first program was held at U32 High School on March 5<sup>th</sup> with two members of the Outreach and Function Group participating.
- Working with our sub-committee on *Awareness of Consequences*, a local teen group has recently completed a DUI video to create awareness of the consequences of driving under the influence. The video will be used on community television stations.
- The Governor proclaimed June as *Teen Highway Safety Month*. This is collaborative accomplishment of the GHSP and the Youth Safety Council of Vermont.
- The Yoga Park Bench initiative was launched to keep drivers alert. This is a combined effort of the GHSP, the Vermont Information Centers, and the Council on Physical Fitness and Sports.

#### Law Enforcement:

One of the SHSP Critical Emphasis Areas is to curb speeding and aggressive driving. Enforcement is an important strategy supporting that goal.

- The SHSP Law Enforcement Group developed a plan to deploy high-visibility enforcement efforts that strategically address speeding. High-visibility enforcement at high-risk areas will send a clear message – Don’t speed!

The plan calls for media outreach. Enforcement will be for 30 hours per month for three months during day/time & time of year of the greatest crash risk. That will be followed by ten hours for the next three months. Experience shows that regular enforcement at a high-risk location changes drivers’ behavior especially on a regularly traveled commuter route.

To identify possible enforcement zones, research was conducted on fatal and injury crashes related to speeding and aggressive driving. Several locations have been identified.

- A speed management workshop was held in Chittenden County in November 2007 at which several law enforcement officers, town officials and other state and local representatives convened. A coalition was formed to address problem roads in Chittenden County. Other meetings are planned.
- The SHSP Law Enforcement Group also discussed possible legislation for the 2009-2010 session that would help speed enforcement. Automatic speed enforcement with speed cameras was also discussed.

- Over a period of time, the results of these efforts should be seen in crash data statistics. The measure of success is:
  - Reduction in the number of high speeders (site specific)
  - Overall reduction in the number of speed related crashes

### Legislative Initiatives

There are a number of SHSP strategies that will require legislation before they can be implemented. The SHSP Core Group will work with agency heads to promote highway safety-related legislation in the 2009 session.

Recommended legislation will address several key areas:

- Strengthening the Vermont graduated license law for young drivers
- Improve parental accountability in young driver training and behavior
- Strengthen safety belt laws
- Increase enforcement of traffic safety laws in Vermont
- Start a Teen Driver Essential Skills program
- Enact statutes related to aggressive driving and distracted driving.
- Enable automated speed enforcement
- Require remedial driver education as a condition for license reinstatement
- Enact a partial cell phone restriction
- Enact an ignition interlock law to keep repeat DUI offenders off the road.

### SHSP Crash Data Analysis

The SHSP stakeholders must make choices between competing safety needs. Those choices are data driven. It is essential to invest time and money in areas that achievable, and provide the greatest safety improvements for the dollars and effort.

To that end, the Vermont Center for Justice Research (VCJR) analyzed crash history and related it to the SHSP emphasis areas. The original analysis covered the years 1999 – 2003. That analysis caused the SHSP Committees to choose the emphasis areas of:

- Keeping vehicles on the road
- Crashes at intersections
- Drivers under the age of 21
- Restraint devices
- Alcohol-related crashes
- Crashes involving speeding and aggressive driving
- Inattention

A recent analysis of crashes from 2002 – 2006 shows that the general distribution of crashes has not changes significantly. It confirms the SHSP choices made earlier.

VTrans and the law enforcement community have made major improvement in collecting crash information. The amount, timeliness, and quality of information have greatly improved over the last two years due to training, crash forms, and a web-based crash entry system. Crash data will let the SHSP groups analyze the effectiveness of their activities.