

**Executive Summary:**  
**Wisconsin Department of Transportation**  
**2001**  
**Strategic Highway Safety Plan**  
*Strategies for 2001-2003*



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Photo by Kurt Miller

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## Foreward

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In August 1999, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) identified transportation safety as a priority during its “Strategic Change Event,” an effort involving employees across the department representing many different disciplines to identify the agency’s mission, vision, and values.

In September 2000, some 160 WisDOT employees and transportation safety partners, including representatives from the American Automobile Association, Department of Public Instruction, University of Wisconsin, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Federal Highway Administration, American Association of Retired Persons, the courts, the media, law enforcement and the legislature, met in a Traffic Safety Strategic Change Event to further identify specific actions and develop action plans to increase traffic safety.

The discussions centered on the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Strategic Highway Safety Plan, which listed 22 different safety actions that were recommended as ways to save 5,000 to 7,000 lives nationwide each year. The actions focused on drivers, vehicles, highways, emergency medical services, highway management, and special users - bicyclists and pedestrians. Two other action areas (“Reduce deer/other animal crashes” and “Drive more safely in inclement weather”) were added because they were major traffic safety issues in Wisconsin.

Through WisDOT’s Traffic Safety Strategic Change Event, the Wisconsin list of 24 was pared to seven emphasis areas that participants felt were not only important, but could be influenced by actions taken by WisDOT (see page 4 for a listing of the seven emphasis areas).

Groups were formed to develop strategies that include specific projects and policy recommendations for each of seven safety areas. The following executive summary provides a broad overview of these key strategies.

We would like to thank all of the participants who were involved in the strategic change events that led to the development of this plan. These participants were instrumental in not only identifying key traffic safety issues and concerns, but many were also directly involved in the development of the strategies themselves. We also extend special thanks to WisDOT’s Traffic Safety Council, the WisDOT Board of Directors and the Office of Public Affairs who helped guide the production of this document.

WisDOT cannot prevent all traffic crashes. However, it is our sincere hope that the implementation of these strategies, while consulting and involving all our transportation safety partners, will substantially reduce the rate and severity of crashes on local roads and the state’s highway system for many years to come.

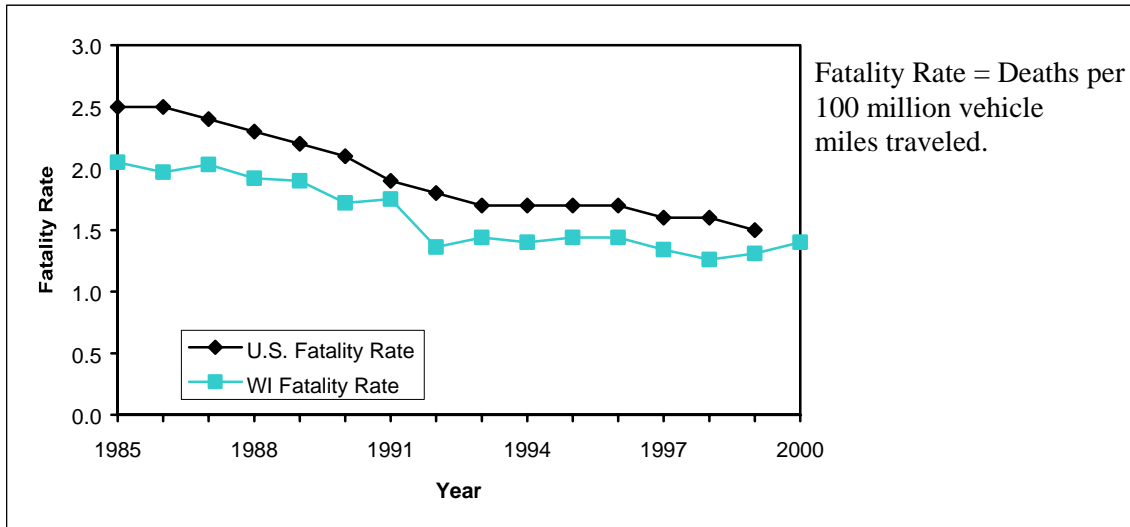
Sincerely,

Terry Mulcahy, P.E.  
Secretary, Wisconsin Department of Transportation

## The Wisconsin Traffic Safety Challenge

Wisconsin traditionally ranks as one of the safest states in the nation. From 1985-2000 Wisconsin's motor vehicle fatality rate decreased 30% from 2.0 to 1.4. Wisconsin has also remained consistently below the national fatality rate.

### Wisconsin U.S. Motor Vehicle Fatality Rates 15-Year Summary



\* U.S. fatality rate figure for 2000 unavailable.

### We can do better

Despite this overall decrease in the fatality rate, deaths and injuries associated with motor vehicle crashes continue to plague the state. For example, for the year 2000, the following grim statistics were witnessed:

- 801 persons were killed in Wisconsin motor vehicle traffic crashes (38% involved alcohol, 29% involved speed, and 15% involved both speed and alcohol).
- 63,890 persons were injured in 43,145 reported injury crashes and 718 fatal crashes.
- An average of two persons were killed every day on Wisconsin highways.

Clearly, efforts to reduce these fatalities and injuries must continue. In order for improvement to take place, much work needs to be accomplished by WisDOT and Wisconsin's Traffic Safety Partners focusing on the whole range of traffic safety issues. This plan focuses on seven key traffic safety areas - areas that were chosen by WisDOT in consultation with its partners. These seven emphasis areas were chosen based on the principle that they are not only important, but can also be influenced by proactive actions taken by the department in coordination with Wisconsin's Transportation Safety Partners between 2001-2003.

## **The Seven WisDOT Traffic Safety Emphasis Areas**

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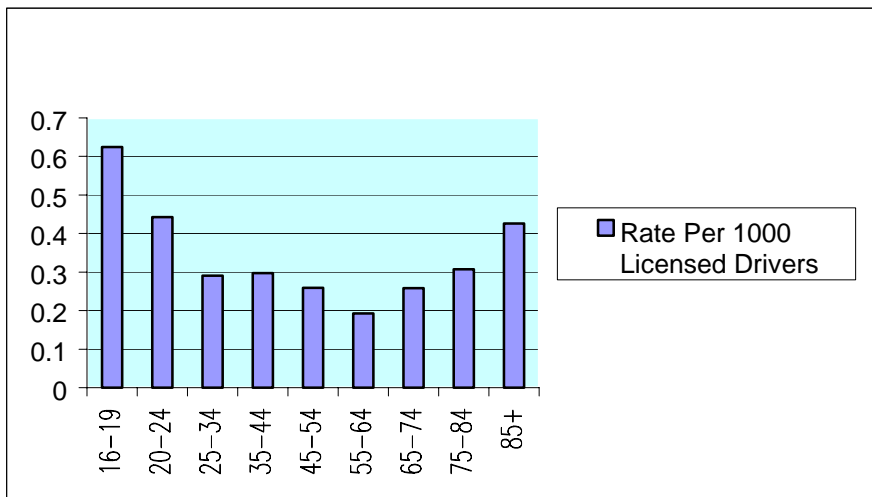
<b><u>Emphasis Area</u></b>	<b><u>Page</u></b>
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## Institute and Evaluate Graduated Driver Licensing

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**Background.** In 2000, young drivers between the ages of 16 and 24 had the highest fatality rate per 1,000 licensed drivers in Wisconsin. During 2000, 138 people ages 16-19 (12% of the total) were killed and 12,609 injured (16% of the total) within the state. Younger drivers are also disproportionately represented in crashes where alcohol is a factor. A lack of driving experience and a tendency toward risk taking also contribute to the sobering crash statistics for young drivers. In light of these facts, it is reasonable and fair to target young drivers for safety measures that are tailored to reduce fatalities and serious injuries within this age group. GDL is a key component in WisDOT's broader safety program. Currently, all the stakeholders are waiting for the results of the 2000 GDL law.

**Fatal Crash Rate by Age Group for 2000**



### Strategies

- Measure the impact of GDL in terms of behavior of drivers under 18.
- Reduce the rate of crashes, violations, loss of driving privileges and road test failures for drivers under 18.
- Determine the difference between pre and post GDL date of first citation (i.e. length of time between license issuance and first moving violation).
- Make recommendations for improvements in the GDL law.

## **Improve the Design and Operation of Intersections**

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**Background.** Injury and fatality statistics for highway intersections provide ample evidence that strategies to improve the safety of these crash-prone areas are urgently needed. In 1999, 31% of all fatal crashes in Wisconsin occurred at intersections. In addition, over 50% of all injuries in Wisconsin occur at intersections. Safety literature also indicates that the two most prominent crash scenarios involve left turns and being struck from the rear. Right-angle collisions are a predominate cause of death at intersections.



### **Strategies:**

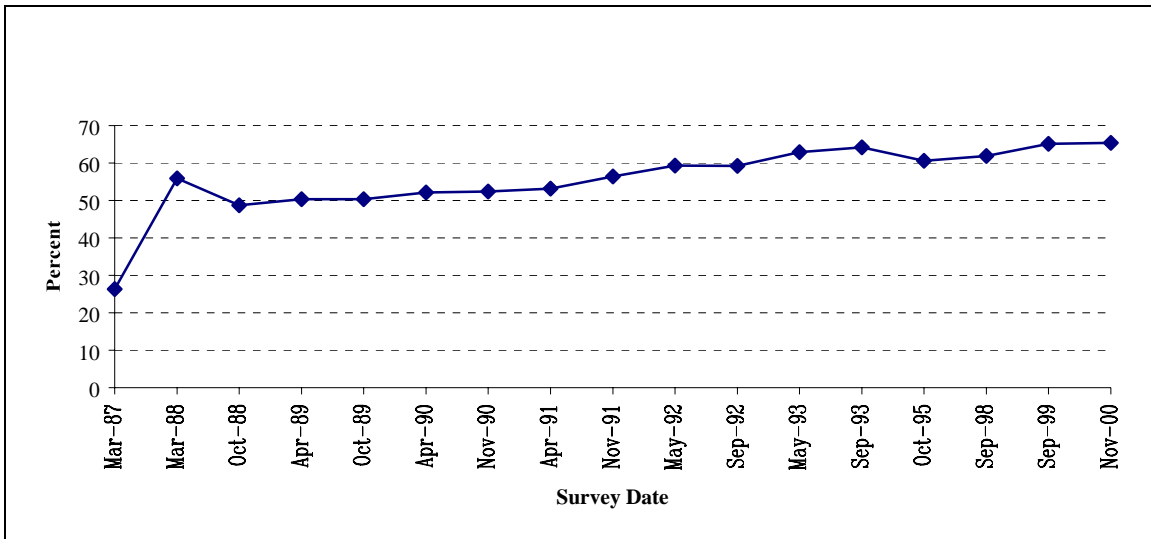
- Implement a comprehensive program to improve marking, traffic signals, lights and signage to give better guidance to drivers at intersections, thereby reducing the number and severity of intersection crashes.
- Effectively communicate the objectives and results of the program.
- Develop a plan of action to implement the program.

## Increase Seatbelt Use

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**Background.** The safety belt is among the most effective safety innovations ever designed for motor vehicles. NHTSA estimates that between 1983 and 1987, belt use laws saved nearly 7,000 lives. Current usage for seat belts in Wisconsin is around 65%. Wisconsin's traffic fatality total exceeded 800 persons killed last year for the first time since 1989. WisDOT believes the number of lives saved could be substantially increased if more people used safety belts. Clearly, seat belt usage is higher in states with standard (primary enforcement) safety belt laws than in those with less demanding laws or none at all. States such as California and North Carolina realized significant increases in safety belt usage through the combination of a standard law and an aggressive awareness campaign and enforcement effort.

### Wisconsin Seat Belt Use



(Note: The chronology on the graph is not to scale due to irregularity in collection dates.)

### Strategies:

- Support safety belt coalition effort by providing current and accurate data.
- If the standardized safety belt law is passed, provide support and education to law enforcement agencies on standard enforcement of the law as well as education to the motoring public. This will include providing key messages to the public via the media and advertisements once the law is passed.
- Continue current public education programs to increase safety belt usage.

## **Increase Driver Safety Awareness**

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**Background.** Ignorance and cavalier attitudes about traffic safety issues are commonplace yet difficult to quantify. It is clear, however, that many drivers fail to understand the seriousness and potential adverse consequences of aggressive driving, impaired driving or failing to properly use safety belts. These are all major causes of motor vehicle fatalities and injuries.

Research indicates that approximately 85 percent of the causation factors associated with crashes are attributed to the driver. Many of these drivers are unaware or have underestimated the risks and/or consequences associated with these various unsafe driving behaviors. Wisconsin has a vested interest in ensuring that drivers are as knowledgeable of highway safety issues as is reasonably possible.



### **Strategies:**

#### **Develop public relations campaigns and a plan of action for:**

- Safety at intersections
- Impaired driving
- Seasonal campaigns
- Special emphasis/events
- Safe driving and rules of the road

## **Improve Data and Decision Support Systems**

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**Background.** Good information properly used is one of the underpinnings of a sound traffic safety enterprise. It is essential to maintain the most up-to-date and accurate driving records so that appropriate measures can be taken to protect public safety. The how, who, when, where, and why of crashes need to be recorded. This data is analyzed and used in the formation of safety policy as well as for other WisDOT departmental functions and activities. The technology exists to gather, integrate, and utilize information on a wide variety of important traffic safety issues. The state's current traffic crash system is not conducive to automation or interoperability with other data collection systems. New systems created must include features that allow rapid updating of driving and accident records through electronic transmission of data. Understanding and using information technology to the greatest advantage is a critical challenge to WisDOT.



### **Strategies:**

- Implement an automated traffic crash reporting system to decrease data collection time, reduce resources needed to collect data, and improve the quality of data.
- Improve dissemination and availability of crash data.
- Develop a plan of action to implement the program involving State Patrol and local law enforcement agencies.

## **Keep Vehicles on the Roadway and Minimize the Consequences of Leaving the Roadway**

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**Background.** According to national statistics from the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA), one-third of all fatalities result from vehicles leaving the road and hitting some fixed object or overturning. In addition to strategies designed to reduce the number of vehicles leaving the roadway, efforts to minimize the consequences when that happens can also reduce injuries and fatalities.



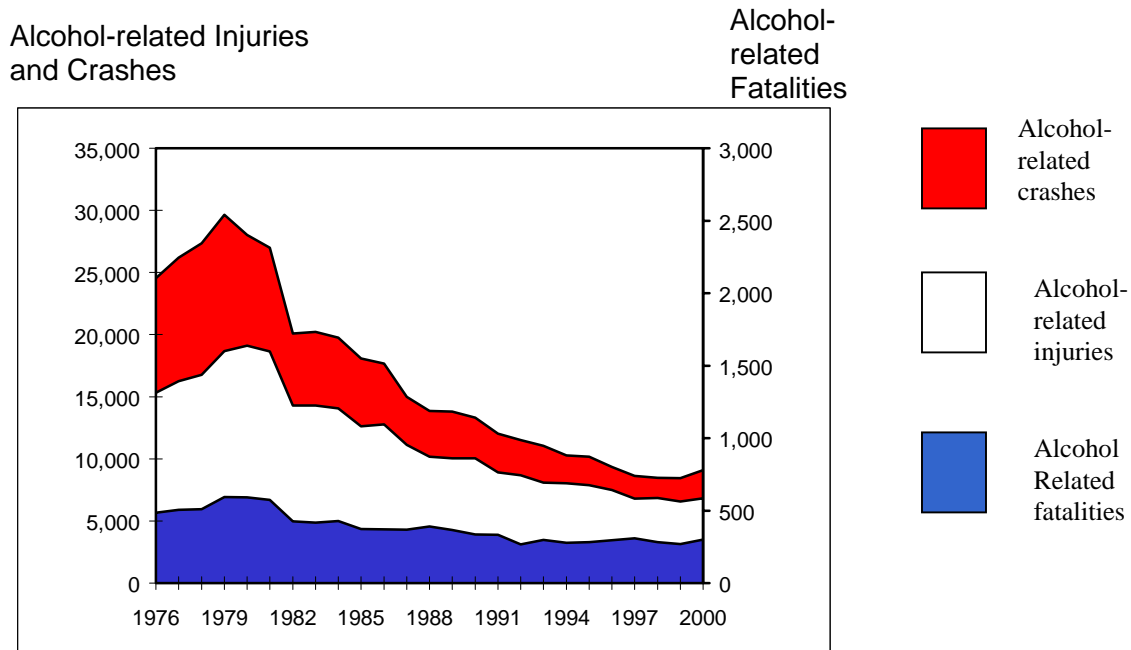
### **Strategies:**

- Implement a comprehensive program to improve signage and marking on the State Trunk Highway system to reduce the number of run off the roadway (ROR) crashes.
- Identify the various types and obstacles hit in ROR crashes complemented by a proactive approach that seeks to identify potentially hazardous conditions or places.
- Incorporate findings into the highway maintenance, design and construction process.
- Effectively communicate the objectives and results of the program.
- Develop a plan of action to implement the program.

## Reduce Impaired Driving

**Background:** Among all traffic safety issues, impaired driving has perhaps the highest profile and combating it has been vigorously pursued for decades with aggressive campaigns in both the public and private sectors. The efforts of law enforcement, state legislatures and citizen organizations helped reduce the 1995 alcohol-related fatality rate 24 percent nationwide from its 1985 level – a laudable achievement. Still, alcohol continues to play a major role in motor vehicle fatalities. In 2000, there were 301 alcohol-related fatalities (38% of total) in Wisconsin. In addition, there were also 6,836 injuries (11% of total injuries) and 9,096 crashes (7% of total crashes), which were alcohol-related for that same year.

### Alcohol-Related Injuries and Fatalities From Motor Vehicle Crashes (1976-2000)



#### Strategies:

- Conduct an alcohol forum for Wisconsin to address impaired driving issues and to help solidify the establishment of a broad-based coalition that will address the mission of reducing impaired driving.
- Implement a widely accepted, designated driver/safe rider program. Raise public awareness of the program.