

*Project No. 17-18 (016)*

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*Creating a Traffic Safety Culture - A Case Study of Four Successful States  
Case Study Three: Washington*

**PRELIMINARY DRAFT  
FINAL REPORT**

*Prepared for  
National Cooperative Highway Research Program  
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Of  
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**TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH BOARD  
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## **DISCLAIMER**

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## ABSTRACT

This is the third of a series of reports intended to document results from four case studies. Conducted in four States – Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota and Washington – the studies were designed to identify which technical and institutional factors most likely led to the creation of a successful culture of safety. The third study, conducted in Washington State, included interviews held with selected key Federal, State, and local safety officials. The interview questions were centered on four key focus areas – background information, organizational leadership, political leadership and institutionalizing safety. The most effective strategies, which are documented in the report, have led to significant reductions in the State’s fatality rate and the highest seat belt use rate in the country. The findings indicate that the foundation for Washington’s safety achievements has been the State’s Traffic Safety Commission which was established in 1967 by legislative mandate. Chaired by the governor, the broad-based State and local agency membership has provided a comprehensive, data-driven approach to collaboratively addressing safety challenges on a statewide basis. The commission’s decision in 2000 to adopt a strategic plan with a Target Zero goal – zero fatalities by 2030 – was a groundbreaking endeavor. This vision has led to the enactment of stronger laws, more efficient data systems, significant resources directed at high crash corridors on both State and local roadways, and accountability for performance. The willingness of the State agencies to openly share information and program results has fostered a unique relationship with the public. In return, the State receives a high level of support for the enactment of strong traffic safety policies and the implementation of innovative programs. For the future, the enhanced Strategic Highway Safety Plan continues to set the State’s sights firmly on nothing less than full achievement of the Target Zero goal.

## CREATING A TRAFFIC SAFETY CULTURE - WASHINGTON

### *Foreword*

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) in cooperation with the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) sponsored this Case Study to document organizational elements that support successful State programs and strategies to reduce highway fatalities and serious injuries.

The Case Study examines the technical and institutional factors implemented by the State Departments of Transportation (DOT) and State Highway Safety Offices (SHSO) in Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota and Washington that resulted in a culture of safety in each State. These States were selected based upon their success in reducing fatalities and serious injuries over time. The Case Study covers the past 30 years and focuses on key milestones, individuals and agencies. The champions of safety and the actions that led to both immediate gains and sustained safety achievements over time are highlighted. The Case Study for each State is contained in a separate report. An executive-level presentation describing common themes noted in all four States will also be available.

The primary focus of this Case Study is the role of the State DOT and the SHSO in supporting the traffic safety culture. Interviews were conducted in each State with the Governor's Highway Safety Representative/SHSO Director, the DOT Safety Engineer and Planner, FHWA and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) representatives, Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), and local agencies. Although additional key State and local traffic safety partners have made significant contributions to the State safety programs, they were not individually interviewed for the Case Study and their contribution is referenced only in a general manner.

The target audience of the Case Study is the mid and higher levels of leadership in the transportation safety community, including the DOT Safety Engineers and SHSO Directors who are responsible for implementing the State Strategic Highway Safety Plans. It is hoped that sharing these lessons learned will provide other States with useful information and guidance to further enhance their safety programs.

### *Executive Summary*

Amidst a national environment of traffic fatality rates which stubbornly remain at virtually the same level, a few States have managed to break out of the norm and excel. These States have found the key to successfully reducing traffic-related fatalities and injuries at record rates. Although some strategies may be more effective in one State compared to another, the common denominator in most successful States is a long term investment in developing a statewide traffic safety culture. By understanding some of the key elements which led to the achievement of such environments, other States faced

with similar challenges may learn lessons to assist them in reversing their fatality trends as well.

Washington State is a stellar example of the high level of progress that can be made to improve the safety of roadways. The State has experienced a significant decrease in its overall fatality rate, alcohol-related fatality numbers are at an all time low and seat belt use is the highest of any State in the country.

The Washington Traffic Safety Commission has a long history of providing leadership, direction and focus to the State's program. The commission, begun in 1967 by legislative mandate, has provided a high level of visibility through its chair, the governor, and a broad-based representation of key State and local agencies. The Washington Department of Transportation and Washington State Patrol also play significant roles. Long ago, the State agencies erased organizational lines and focused solely on Target Zero, a strategic goal to reduce fatalities to zero by 2030. That decision provided the impetus to strengthen the safety infrastructure, enact strong traffic safety laws, encourage community-based programs, obtain accurate data and, most recently, require accountability for individual and program performance.

Two initiatives in particular, the Corridor Safety Program and Community Traffic Safety Task Forces, are wholeheartedly supported by the commission. These programs ensure that essential technical and monetary resources are available to local agencies. This significant level of funding investment into low cost improvements, applied to high crash areas, has netted big results for the statewide safety picture.

Washington's comprehensive, collaborative effort has developed over the years under the continued guidance of dedicated agency leaders and safety champions. A number of valuable partners from key industries and other safety related organizations have also fully embraced the Target Zero goal. One of the largest and more visible partners has been the law enforcement community. Armed with strict laws and the backing of the general public, the enforcement community at all levels has fully embraced the State's traffic safety strategy and implemented the national model for seat belt and impaired driving mobilizations. This approach, specifically designed to influence the highest risk drivers, has worked exceedingly well for Washington as evidenced by the State's record high seat belt use rate and low number of alcohol-related fatalities.

Washington had developed a Strategic Highway Safety Plan in 2000 to support its Target Zero initiative. This history positioned the State well to meet the new Federal requirement in 2005 that every State prepare a comprehensive strategic highway safety plan. Seizing the opportunity, the State expanded its outreach even further, and renewed its commitment to seeking research-based solutions. And, breaking with tradition, it was the secretary of transportation himself that recognized and supported driver behavior as the top SHSP priority over engineering initiatives. The message resounded loud and clear – it is the data that drives the plan.

The State's traffic safety program has an additional secret ingredient. This strategy, performance accountability, ensures that the value of its hard work and invested dollars

is fully realized. Mandated by the governor for all of State government, the agencies must report their program results to her office through a system called *Government Management Accountability and Performance*. But the traffic safety program goes even further. The State Patrol has instituted an internal system of *Accountability Driven Leadership* and the Department of Transportation reports its results directly to the public each quarter in its *Gray Notebook*. These commitments to sharing performance data have resonated with the public and surely contributed to the high level of trust and support shown for traffic safety programs.

It is apparent that the many successes achieved by Washington have flourished within its strong culture of traffic safety. Focused on Target Zero and with high expectations of achieving it, the State is well positioned to make zero fatalities not just a goal, but a reality.

## I. Introduction

The State of Washington has been highly successful in driving down the traffic-related fatality rate to record lows while the national average has remained stalled. Since 1980, the State has experienced a 70 percent decrease in the fatality rate based on 100 million vehicle miles traveled (VMT) on all public roads and a 74 percent decrease on State highways. These outstanding accomplishments have been supported by a similarly impressive decrease in the number of impaired-driving related fatalities from 619 in 1980, to 271 in 2005. And, the State's seat belt use rate is at the very top of the nation's chart. Recorded at 96.3 percent in 2006, the State achieved the highest seat belt use rate in the country.

**TABLE 1. WASHINGTON 2005 ROADWAY CHARACTERISTICS**

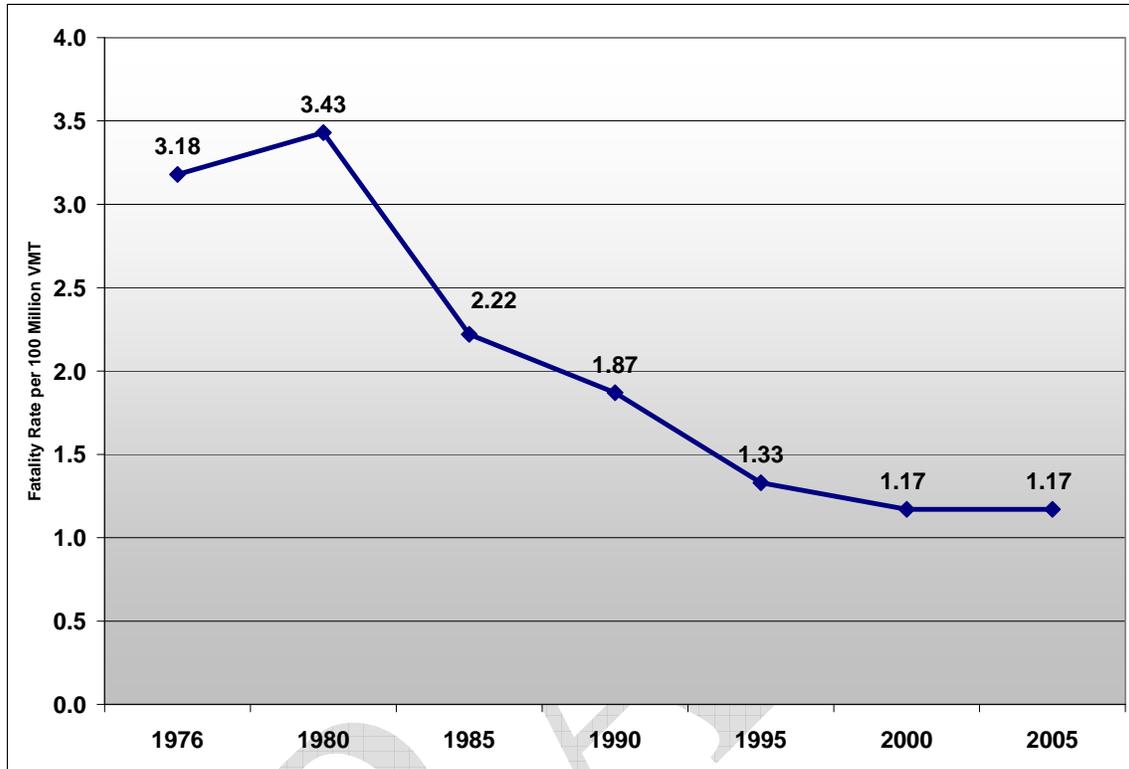
- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Population: 6,265,4000</li><li>• Registered Drivers: 4,725,224</li><li>• Registered Vehicles: 5,724,912</li><li>• Roadway:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 8% State</li><li>• 68% City and County Roads</li><li>• 24% Other</li></ul></li><li>• Annual VMT: 5.6 billion</li></ul> |
|--|

SOURCE: Washington Office of Financial Management 2005 Data Book and Washington Traffic Safety Commission

The strength of Washington's results is in the traffic safety culture which originates within the Washington Traffic Safety Commission (WTSC) and its partnerships with other State agencies, in particular the Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and the Washington State Patrol (WSP).

With dedicated leadership, a strong commission structure, and a commitment to building effective community and regional safety programs, the WTSC, WSDOT, and

the WSP have been central to building Washington’s statewide culture of safety. In fact, it is through their efforts and successes that these same leaders gained the ability to set very aggressive safety goals for the future.



**Figure 1. 1976-2005 Washington Fatality Rate per 100 Million Vehicle Miles Traveled**  
SOURCE: Washington Traffic Safety Commission and Washington Department of Transportation

To encourage local participation in the State’s safety efforts, Community Traffic Safety Task Forces together with Corridor Safety Programs have formed the backbone of the WTSC’s outreach strategy and have succeeded in improving safety on all roadways.

## *II. Findings*

### **Building a Culture of Safety:**

#### **Key Leadership and State Support**

##### **Washington Traffic Safety Commission (WTSC)**

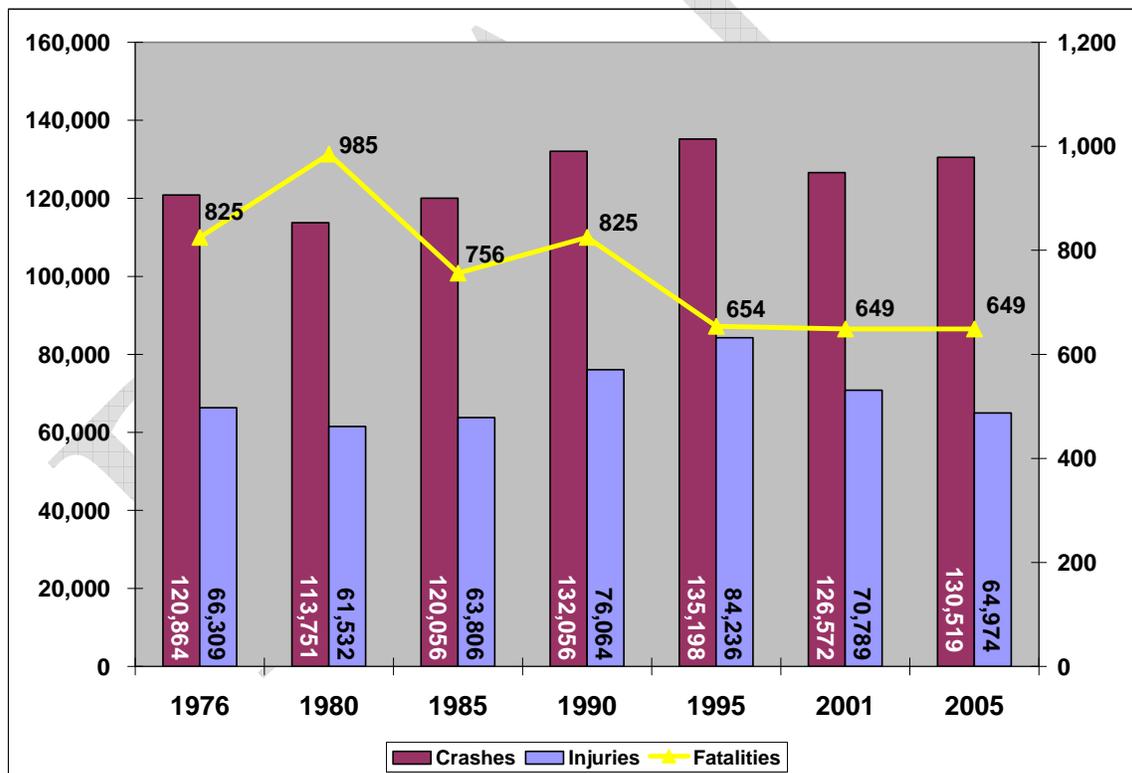
Washington’s culture of safety developed its strong roots through the establishment of the WTSC. Modeled after recommendations suggested by the Federal Highway Safety Act in 1966, the commission structure was put into place in 1967 by State law. The 10 member WTSC has a broad-based representation including State agencies, cities, counties, and the judiciary.

**Table 2. Washington State Traffic Safety Commission Members**

<u>Washington Traffic Safety Commission Members</u>	
Governor	
Department of Licensing	
Department of Public Health	
Department of Social and Health Services	
Department of Transportation	
Superintendent of Public Instruction	
Washington State Patrol	
King County District Court	
Washington Association of Cities	
Washington Association of Counties	

The governor serves as the chairperson and takes an active role in policy setting, as well as in making decisions regarding the direction of the commission. Appointed by the governor, the commission director has direct access to the

cabinet-level State agency members including the chief of the WSP, secretary of transportation, secretary of health, and other State agency commissioners. With the backing of the governor, and open lines of communication, the WTSC has been able to develop a strong working relationship with agency heads and key policy setters in the State.



**Figure 2. 1976-2005 Number of Washington Traffic Crashes, Fatalities and Injuries**  
 SOURCE: Washington Traffic Safety Commission and Washington Department of Transportation

One of the key stabilizing factors of the WTSC has been the length of service of the deputy director. The current deputy has served in that capacity since 1989, building

trusted long-term relationships with the legislature and other State agency executives. Those relationships have been instrumental in Washington's ability to move key traffic safety public policy initiatives forward. As the program director, stability in the deputy director's position has also provided historical perspective and continuity to safety programs funded and implemented by the WTSC.

The WTSC is staffed with five program managers. Three managers oversee the impaired driving, occupant protection, and speed programs, while the other two are solely responsible for the Community Task Force program and the Corridor Safety Program. Of the five traffic safety programs, the latter two function as the primary vehicle for reaching out to local governments. With these two programs specifically, the WTSC has demonstrated a long term commitment and belief in the importance of implementing action at the community level. The agency's support is demonstrated in the staffing resources allocated to these programs. There has been a dedicated Community Task Force manager since 1990, and a Corridor Program manager since the mid-1990s.

Since the mid-1980s, the WTSC has maintained an internal research staff to evaluate data for the WTSC and their agency partners. To support legislative initiatives – as well as program planning and implementation – the research staff is available to those in leadership positions, allowing detailed and targeted analysis of data to be available quickly. With their ability to present the information in clear and concise terms, the research staff has bolstered the WTSC's ability to react in a timely manner to legislative priorities and provide accurate evaluations of the traffic safety programs.

With a strong history of collaboration, partnerships between the WTSC agencies – as well as between the WTSC, the WSP, and the WSDOT – have been the primary influence in creating a culture of safety in Washington. Not only have these partnerships been the driving force behind State program initiatives, but local programs, as well.

### **Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT)**

Although the WSDOT is centrally organized, the Department has divided the State into six regions which provide critical support for local safety programming and projects. Regional and local programs have been vital to Washington's success in spreading a culture of safety throughout the State. Programming decisions and recommendations are made in the regions, while policies are made centrally and then implemented at the regional level.

The WSDOT Highways and Local Programs Division (H&LP) is the central point for the local roads programs. With an H&LP office in each of the WSDOT regions, the assigned engineers provide a direct link to local agencies. In addition, they regularly provide educational and technical assistance, financial resources, and support to identify and complete local projects. The end result is a truly cooperative and successful partnership between the WSDOT and local governments.

Unlike some State DOTs, Washington does not have a designated safety office or a safety engineer. Rather, the WSDOT has a unique structure - the Highway Safety Issues Group (HSIG) - which was developed in the 1980s to address safety issues based upon a

team approach. System planners, program management, traffic operations, and regional traffic and design engineers form the core of the HSIG. HSIG coordinates the development of safety policy, plans and programs for the department. With representation from throughout WSDOT, safety is not focused within one organizational unit or individual. Working cooperatively to improve safety, the HSIG identifies areas for improvement and develops recommendations to optimize highway safety resources. Program recommendations can be initiated by the HSIG for consideration by management or management may present operational strategies to the HSIG for review and possible implementation.

Over the past five years, the WSDOT – in collaboration with local agencies – has made a philosophical shift in the way its statewide safety programs are implemented. Through partnerships with the FHWA and the County Road Administration Board (CRAB), the WSDOT has created a two-lane rural road team that is able to implement high benefit safety initiatives such as rumble strips, signing, and striping projects on local roads statewide. By working with CRAB's State organization, the WSDOT provides information and resources to complement programs supported by the H&LP division that positively influence fatality rates. WSDOT's rural roads program provides up to \$500,000 in Federal funds annually for implementation of low cost roadway improvements to counties demonstrating higher than average crash rates on local roads. With the support of State agencies, locally developed data-driven programs have been essential to the Washington strategy to reduce deaths and injuries on their roadways.

As part of the Department's commitment to safety, the WSDOT has implemented a Highway Safety Improvement sub-program in high frequency crash locations on State roads. Projects include adding turn lanes, installing median barriers and rumble strips, reducing the risks to pedestrians, and implementing other low cost improvements (each project is usually less than \$50,000). The target locations are generated by High Accident Location listings, regional operational reviews, and responses to constituent comments, complaints, and suggestions. During the 2003-2005 biennium there were 808 low cost enhancement projects completed statewide, totaling \$4,338,297. From July 1, 2005, to December 31, 2006, there were 326 projects completed for a cost of \$3,026,029.

### **Washington State Patrol (WSP)**

The WSP is a full service public safety agency that has always maintained a strong focus on traffic law enforcement. In fact, both the State's reduction in alcohol-related fatalities, as well as its increase in seat belt use rates (even prior to enacting the primary enforcement seat belt law), are a testament to the agency's committed attention to strict enforcement and communication of that policy to the public.

With a strong economy in the 1980s, the WSP envisioned considerable growth and began development of a system of strategic planning. Since then, the WSP continued to improve their planning and accountability process culminating in the current system of "Accountability Driven Leadership". This system evaluates individual performance of District commanders in support of the WSP's and of each District's strategic plan. The process holds individuals accountable starting with troopers reporting assessment data

to their sergeants, all the way up the chain of command to bureau chiefs and ultimately to the WSP chief.

Monthly meetings are conducted to allow captains from the eight districts to report on all operations of the WSP. These meetings provide an opportunity to discuss their district community outreach activities, accomplishments from the previous month, and challenges. Key performance measures raised in the monthly reviews include traffic law enforcement with a focus on impaired driving and speed.

To further support statewide and local safety initiatives, the WSP is an active member of the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs (WASPC). Founded in 1963, the WASPC is unique in that it is the only statewide law enforcement association in the country that includes partnerships among State, local, tribal, and Federal law enforcement agencies. The WASPC provides an open venue to review common issues among its members, and has strengthened the culture of safety within the law enforcement community. Moreover, the relationships which have formed through this association have enhanced cooperative efforts to address impaired driving and other traffic-related issues throughout the State.

The State legislature has been very supportive of these efforts by providing law enforcement with the tools necessary to reduce the number and severity of crashes. A mandatory all-rider motorcycle helmet law and a primary enforcement seat belt law for all seating positions are just two examples of their commitment to enforcement.

### **State Agency Partnering**

By taking full advantage of both formal and informal opportunities to share information and resources, the State agencies have worked together to strengthen their relationships and make significant progress in their efforts to address traffic safety issues.

Held every other month, WTSC meetings have proven to be an instrumental means of keeping agency activities aligned on an ongoing basis. The position of chairperson is rotated to a different member of the commission for each meeting, thus keeping all members engaged in the process. Moreover, as different members bring their unique agency perspective to the forefront when it is their time to lead, rotating the chairperson has brought about more dynamic results.

Since the late 1990s, the WSDOT and WSP management teams have met annually to discuss principal issues from the previous year, and explore direction for the year ahead. These annual meetings build relationships at all levels among regional administrators, WSP officers, and local and regional traffic engineers.

A formal Joint Operating Policy Statement (JOPS) – signed by the secretary of transportation and the chief of the WSP – outlines key initiatives that exist between the WSDOT and the WSP. The JOPS document has encouraged the coordination of activity and accountability between the departments, as well as in their respective roles in the operation of Washington’s highways and other statewide operational measures.

Collaboration between State agencies – and their commitment to local programs – laid the foundation in 2000 for the development of Washington’s aggressive Strategic Highway Safety Plan calling for zero fatalities by the year 2030. The concept and development of the plan grew into what is now known as the **“Target Zero” Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP)**.

A system of accountability to the governor and the people of Washington are a high priority for the State. By establishing performance measures and a method to regularly report on activity, the governor, legislature, general public and other safety partners are kept apprised of their goals, strategies and accomplishments. Progress and achievements are tracked and reported publicly through each of the State agency web sites.

A history of commitment, pride, and passion for saving lives are the hallmarks of Washington’s State agency leadership. The WTSC, WSP and WSDOT have all been instrumental in building Washington’s culture of roadway safety. This could not have been done without the commitment of individuals from each of these organizations who have been willing to “expand the envelope”. These leaders have sought out not only research- based programs, but also new and innovative ways to reduce the number of serious injuries and fatalities on Washington’s roadways.

To bolster their safety goals, high-level government leaders have encouraged the State agencies to become involved at the national level. This visibility provides opportunities for the State to explore best practices and participate in creating national guidelines for improving traffic safety. And, best practices are brought back to the State for examination and potential implementation.

Washington was selected as one of the first States to implement the NHTSA Click it or Ticket (CIOT) model of seat belt enforcement. The commitment to work with Federal partners continues today in actively seeking funding and guidance to develop programs that can be implemented through their well-established network of community partners.

As part of this strategy, two pilot programs – Nighttime Seat Belt Enforcement, and, Ticketing Aggressive Cars and Trucks (TACT) – have recently been demonstrated by the WTSC in partnership with other State and Federal agencies.

Recognizing that nighttime seat belt use is below daytime use in Washington, the State agreed to test whether the CIOT model can be applied to seat belt enforcement in the evening and early morning hours. This NHTSA-sponsored program will involve State and local law enforcement agencies in a statewide campaign. A formal evaluation of the project will be completed and the results will be eagerly awaited by the other States.

Washington pilot tested the TACT program in 2004 to reduce collisions between drivers of passenger cars and commercial motor vehicles. The TACT project was based upon the State’s Corridor Safety Program. Planning and implementing the project required a broad base of partners, including representatives from the WTSC, the NHTSA region, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) region, the FHWA, WSDOT,

the WASPC, WSP, and the Washington Trucking Association. The initial intensive, high visibility enforcement effort was evaluated and showed promising results. Success with the pilot locations has led the State to look at other at-risk corridors where additional TACT projects can be implemented.

These are just two examples of the many partnerships that have been fostered between the WTSC and the Federal agencies. In the future, the WTSC intends to rigorously examine every available opportunity to demonstrate innovative strategies in the State for their potential to assist in achieving the Target Zero goal.

### **Community Outreach Programs**

At the heart of the State's traffic safety initiatives, a collaborative effort among the WTSC, WSDOT and WSP has developed a strong source of support for local programs. The Community Traffic Safety Task Forces and the Corridor Safety Programs both have contributed gains as well, by building relationships and addressing traffic safety problems at the local level.

Both local programs offer not only the opportunity to implement data-driven multi-disciplinary approaches to resolving safety issues, but also the identification of locations to try untested – but promising – strategies to improve safety. Further, studies have shown that the Corridor Safety Programs have provided a cost benefit ratio of 35:1 for each public safety dollar invested. It is through these unique cooperative efforts and the alignment of limited resources that these programs have succeeded and continue to be the basis of the traffic safety culture in Washington.

The **Corridor Safety Program** is a critical element of Washington's strategy to reduce roadway fatalities and injuries. These community-based programs are operated jointly by the WSDOT and the WTSC. The vision is to reduce crashes using low-cost solutions through partnerships with local community groups, businesses, engineering, law enforcement, education, and emergency medical services (EMS) organizations.

Requests from local communities to be considered for the program can be brought to the attention of the WTSC from multiple sources at the local level: the police chief, a local traffic engineer, the sheriff or other local advocate. Corridors are selected based on statistically relevant crash problems. In addition to meeting the criteria as a high crash roadway, there must be a local commitment to actively participate in the development and implementation of the project. And, programs must be directed and coordinated locally in each community.

Once the criteria have been satisfied, an initial meeting is facilitated by the WTSC Corridor Safety Program manager. Local stakeholders are presented with a detailed evaluation by the WSDOT to better understand the scope of their crash problem, and to explore potential data-driven, research-based countermeasures. A wide range of community members and stakeholders are invited to be a part of the process.

Based on the countermeasure identified, State resources to implement the program – with local oversight – are provided. Low-cost improvements typically include signing and striping, rumble strips, or signal improvements. The H&LP division collaborates with the WTSC in the Corridor Safety Programs by providing Federal safety funds specifically earmarked to support roadway improvements. State and local enforcement activity, along with the development of any educational messages needed to support the program, is funded by Federal highway safety grant dollars provided through the WTSC.

Problem identification and plan development can take six to nine months, with most projects completed from start to finish within two years. A thorough evaluation is completed following each project. The information validates whether the anticipated return on investment was achieved and helps to support future programming decisions.

Due to the level of State resources required to support a Corridor project, only five to seven corridor projects can be operated in any one year. Since the program began in 1992, a total of 29 projects have been initiated with 21 of them completed at this time. The Corridor Safety Program has resulted in an overall six percent reduction in collisions within the selected corridors, a 20 percent decrease in alcohol-related fatalities, and a 34 percent reduction in fatal and incapacitating injuries. In addition to providing a high return on investment, Corridor Safety Programs have the residual benefit of creating local partnerships and skill sets to address future local traffic safety problems.

Unlike the Corridor Safety Program, **Community Traffic Safety Task Forces** require a more long-term commitment from State and local partners in order to foster the development of communities that can effectively promote traffic safety initiatives.

The WTSC budgets \$1.4 million per biennium of State transportation funding for support of the Task Force program. The funding is granted to local agencies for salary and benefits to support a .85 full time employee at the local level to be the local Task Force coordinator. Biannually, the WTSC sends out requests for proposal to public entities that can apply to house the coordinator's position as their employee. The local grantee must provide a 75 percent direct or indirect match contribution to support the local program.

The first Task Forces – started in 1989 – were focused on impaired driving (Driving Under the Influence - DUI) but have since been expanded and modeled after the national “Safe Communities” structure. To recognize the evolution to a much broader traffic safety objective, they were renamed Community Traffic Safety Task Forces. Reaching over 85 percent of the population, there are currently 23 task forces located in 39 counties.

As multi-disciplinary community organizations, the Task Forces play a significant role in supporting local and statewide traffic safety initiatives. They participate in the coordination of law enforcement activities, including State seat belt and impaired driving mobilizations. In addition, the Task Forces are active at the community level providing local traffic safety presentations, student-oriented safety events (for example,

mock crashes and prom activities), distribution of traffic safety materials, and support of DUI Victim Impact Panels.

The combination of the Corridor Safety Program and the Community Traffic Safety Task Forces has contributed significantly to the comprehensive nature and collaborative character of Washington's statewide culture of traffic safety.

### **State Data Systems**

Through its success in providing high quality data to State agencies and local programs, Washington's traffic records systems have been a vital area of statewide support. In fact, every year a major summary of data is produced that is used to plan programs and identify problems on a statewide basis. The analysis and evaluation of this data are used extensively to support policy decisions, develop and target program activity, and evaluate project performances.

While it has kept pace with changing and emerging technologies, Washington's data collection system has faced challenges in the recent past. Historically, the WSP had been the repository for crash data gathered from the collision reports submitted by State and local law enforcement agencies. In 1996, with the implementation of an optical scanning system for processing traffic crash report forms, the WSP attempted to use new technology to improve efficiency. Unforeseen problems with the implementation of that system resulted in an inability to obtain complete records for crashes and most injuries from 1997 through 2001. Although accurate fatality data was still available, the loss of crash and injury data for those years hampered the State's ability to conduct in-depth analyses of roadway problems, as well as to evaluate program effectiveness. Optical scanning for data collection was never reinstated and reports have since been manually entered.

In order to restore the State's ability to collect and analyze data, Washington's Office of Financial Management brought the State transportation-related agencies together to identify a solution. Because WSDOT had been maintaining a roadway data collection system to gather collision information on State roads, the decision was made - starting in 2001 by legislative mandate - to locate a new statewide crash database within the WSDOT.

In 2002 a new server-based statewide collision records system was developed and implemented. CLAS (Collision Location and Analysis System) is used to capture, store and retrieve data derived from all Police Traffic Collision Reports and Citizen Collision Reports that are filed with the State. In 2003 CLAS was updated to the CLAS EDWMS (Electronic Document Workflow Management System) to facilitate scanning, electronic imaging and document workflow management capabilities.

To facilitate access to crash data, the WSDOT produces statewide crash summaries on a monthly or annual basis. Counties and cities also have access to a crash database maintained by CRAB called 'Mobility'. In addition to maintaining local roadway data,

Mobility has a collision module linked to the CLAS database that gathers crash data from the State database.

All cities and counties have access to the Mobility database to complete their own local analysis. Local agencies also have access to images of the actual collision reports on file in their county through the WSDOT imaging system, a part of CLAS. By logging on to the secure WSDOT site, collision report data can be requested by a jurisdiction and a specific crash report image can be viewed directly on the computer

Washington has continued to work on even greater improvements to their traffic records system. In 2003, the State completed a NHTSA Traffic Records Assessment – last done in the 1990s – that provided best practice recommendations for continuing to improve the system architecture and streamline data management.

A key part of the traffic records strategic plan is the implementation of a consolidated electronic data collection system. After reviewing a number of options, eTRIP – the Electronic Traffic Information Processing program – was selected. eTRIP allows State and local law enforcement agencies to electronically capture and transmit citation and collision reports to the CLAS database while in the field. The program is being implemented in collaboration with the WSP, the WTSC, the WSDOT, the Administrative Office of the Courts, the Department of Licensing, the Department of Information Services and local law enforcement agencies. Agencies are not required to use the new system and paper reports are still in use by law enforcement and for citizen reporting.

In addition to implementing eTRIP, the traffic records strategy also called for establishing a dedicated coordinator. Considered to be another critical strategy in the further development and coordination of the State’s system, a traffic records coordinator was hired in 2004 by the WTSC. As permanent co-chair of the Traffic Records Coordinating Committee, the position provides full-time organizational support, and facilitates the coordination of efficient traffic records systems across all agencies.

## **Washington’s Traffic Safety Community:**

### **Champions of Traffic Safety**

#### **Overall**

The WTSC has been one of the leading contributors to Washington’s gains in traffic safety. With strong leadership and direction within their organization, the WTSC has supported the culture of safety across State agency lines and throughout the State.

Identifying individual champions that have contributed to the success of Washington’s traffic safety history and future outlook is difficult. Leadership and collaborative efforts have been instituted at many levels within various agencies. Within that framework, there have been two individuals that stand out as having made a long term impact on the State’s culture of safety.

### **Outstanding Individuals**

A former secretary of transportation, **Sid Morrison**, is also an avid safety champion. Having also served as a member of the State legislature, and a United States Congressman, he has been very influential in forming Washington's strong traffic safety policies and leadership approach. Recognizing the benefits of the multi-disciplinary structure of the WTSC, his influence and active efforts in the mid-1990s helped to preserve the WTSC as an independent agency when it was in danger of being integrated into another State agency.

**John Moffat**, director of the WTSC from 1995 to 2004, who later became the NHTSA Pacific Northwest regional administrator in 2005. In addition to his many accomplishments in the State, Mr. Moffat is nationally recognized as a champion of traffic safety. As director of the commission, he spearheaded the development of the Washington SHSP in 2000, helping to lay the groundwork for the plan's ultimate Target Zero goal. In fact, it was under Mr. Moffat's leadership that the critical processes and partnerships needed to support the plan were developed.

### **Governors**

Leadership from the State's **governors** over the years has provided a high-level champion to bring safety issues to the attention of the public, legislature, and statewide transportation partners. The most recent governor has been instrumental in developing a system of government accountability. The progress reports generated by the program are the cornerstone that supports implementation of the State's SHSP.

### **State Legislature**

All State and federal transportation funding is managed through the House and Senate Transportation Committees. This unique approach ensures that transportation and traffic safety funds are managed separately and are not tied to the State's general fund. As the managers of Washington's transportation funding, the strength of these committees has also permitted aggressive policy setting in support of traffic safety.

The structure of the WTSC – with representation from key traffic safety agencies and a director appointed by the governor – has made the organization a significant contributor to the successful passage of effective traffic safety laws. The director and deputy director (whose salaries are paid with State funds) regularly testify on safety legislation, providing data and research to assist policy makers as they craft new bills to improve safety in Washington. Access to key legislative leaders and the governor's office give the WTSC a distinct advantage when seeking opportunities to obtain consideration of key policy issues.

Legislative leadership has been critical to the establishment and growth of Washington's culture of traffic safety. Within the legislature, there have been several individual champions who have supported key traffic safety policy initiatives.

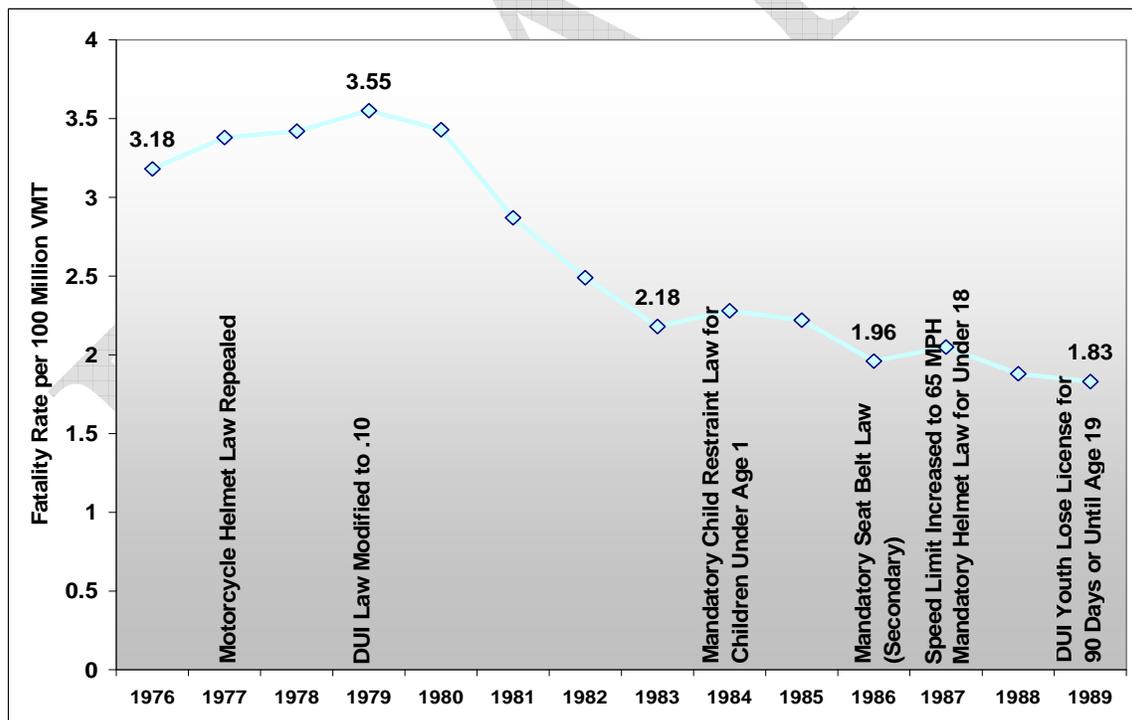
**Senator Mary Margaret Haugen** has a long history of serving Washington, first as a State representative (1982 – 1992), and then again in the Senate (1993 to present). The

current chair of the Senate Transportation Committee, Senator Haugen, was a sponsor of Washington’s primary enforcement seat belt bill that passed in 2002.

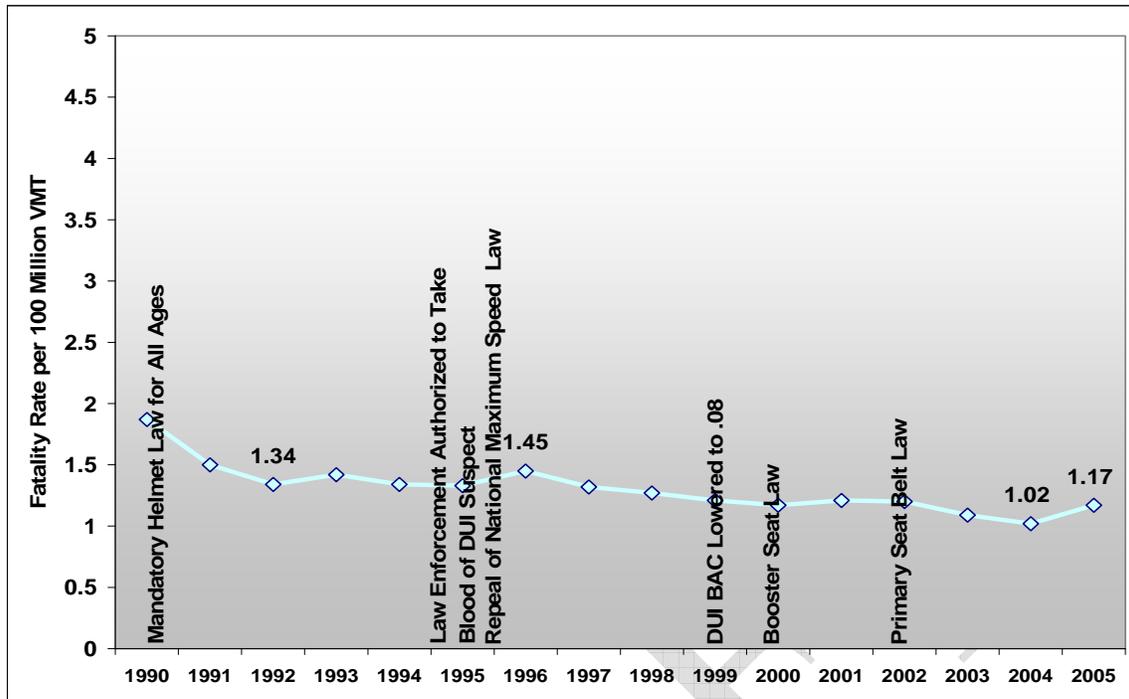
Serving a third term as President of the Senate, and having been the previous chairperson of the Senate Transportation Committee, **Lt. Governor Brad Owen** is a strong advocate for public safety. He has supported issues to address youth and teen safety, as well as substance abuse as it relates to traffic safety.

After serving in the WSP for 31 years, in 1998 **Representative John Lovik** began his career in the House, and is the current speaker pro tempore. Representative Lovik, a strong advocate and sponsor of the primary enforcement seat belt law, has also supported other traffic safety legislation. His interests have included proposing the use of automated cameras for traffic enforcement, as well as mandating child restraint seats.

High expectations on the part of the general public regarding issues of health, public safety, and public welfare, have helped to drive Washington’s traffic safety policy. The State’s political leaders, through their unyielding support of the public’s priorities, have played an integral role in ensuring the strength of this key component of the State’s safety program.



**Figure 3. Major Policy Initiatives and Fatality Rates in Washington from 1975 – 1989**  
 SOURCE: Washington Traffic Safety Commission and Washington Department of Transportation



**Figure 4. Major Policy Initiatives and Fatality Rates in Washington from 1990 – 2005**

SOURCE: Washington Traffic Safety Commission and Washington Department of Transportation

## Supporting the Network:

### Partnerships

A broad base of partnerships is critical to developing and delivering traffic safety programs on a statewide basis. There are many partners – large and small – who have supported Washington’s traffic safety initiatives through the years. Regardless of the size of their organization, each of the following organizations has made a positive contribution to Washington’s growing culture of safety.

- The **EMS** community has been a strong traffic safety partner at the State and local levels for many years. As they are often community leaders as well, EMS personnel are highly involved individuals who want to make significant contributions to Washington’s safety initiatives. EMS has been very active within the Corridor Safety Programs and, along with the Trauma Councils around the State, performs work similar to the Community Traffic Safety Task Forces. In addition, EMS is very active in the State Traffic Records Committee. An EMS priority is the analyses of methods to electronically collect, compile, and disseminate EMS data collected by first responders. With representation from the Department of Health, EMS members have also become significant contributors to the State SHSP.
- A program of the University of Washington, **Harbor View Injury Prevention and Research Center** is a major trauma center in the northwestern section of the State. The Center has conducted major studies and cost analyses under contract

- for the WTSC. The studies were a key component of the State’s ability to enact the primary enforcement seat belt and motorcycle helmet legislative initiatives.
- **AAA Washington** is a private sector partner that participates in various WTSC forums. The association has supported many State safety campaigns by including campaign messages in their radio spots, as well as through outreach in their membership newsletter. Surveys distributed via newsletter provide input to the WTSC on traffic safety opinions and awareness levels.
  - **Safe Kids of Washington State** is housed within the Department of Health and is actively involved in child passenger safety, in addition to school bus and school zone safety. Safe Kids disseminates information as part of its outreach efforts to support child safety legislative initiatives.
  - The **Washington Traffic Safety Education Association (WTSEA)** is the State’s driver training instructor organization and has been a partner in implementing the graduated driver licensing (GDL) program since the law passed in 2000. The WTSC supports continuing education for WTSEA driving instructors through a grant funded program with Central Washington University. The Association also helps to support youth programs.
  - **The Washington Trucking Association (WTA)** has been a long term partner of the WTSC working on programs to improve the safety of commercial trucks on the highway by addressing unsafe equipment. The WTA most recently supported the TACT pilot project by providing the commercial trucks that were used as decoys and carried troopers to observe the targeted program violations.

## **Enriching the State Culture of Safety:**

### **Resource Programs**

#### **Public Education**

The WTSC agencies have been very committed to providing information to the public regarding traffic safety. Two full-time staff members are dedicated to work exclusively on public education activities. The communications assistant works specifically with the media, while the other staffer works on web site development, press releases, and press events.

WSDOT’s H&LP division has also made the dissemination of information to the public a priority. A four page folio has been produced that can be distributed as a hard copy, or accessed on the web site. The folio outlines technical assistance services that are available through the division. And, at the local level, H&LP works in cooperation with other WTSC agencies to provide information to school districts and local communities for training on Safe Routes to School and other safety programs.

Many State and local agencies have also proactively pursued interaction with the public on traffic safety initiatives. The Corridor Safety and the Community Traffic Safety Task Force programs provide many opportunities to communicate with the public through local organizational meetings and the provision of program support. Moreover, the WTSC Community Traffic Safety Task Force program manager meets semiannually with the 23 Task Forces located throughout the State.

## **Media**

When developing advertising messages in support of traffic safety initiatives, the WTSC conducts market surveys and focus tests to ensure that their media messages will be as effective as possible. The WTSC fully utilizes paid advertising following the NHTSA model for maximum effectiveness. In recognition of the importance of the combination, enforcement mobilization campaigns are typically supported with equal amounts of funding for both paid media and enforcement activity.

Utilizing the services of an expert consultant, the WTSC has greatly improved the earned media coverage of their press events. Additional key factors in this success have been the selection of more appropriate locations and better timing to suit media deadlines. Because of their ability to provide information quickly, the WTSC has been able to build and maintain good working relationships with the media. In fact, the WTSC director has committed to creating opportunities for media outreach that have resulted in a dramatic increase in coverage.

Like the WTSC, the WSP views communication with the public as a high priority. As a result, they have established an ongoing interest and strong commitment within the districts to improving media accessibility and sharing information. Each of the eight WSP districts has been assigned a trooper who has been specially trained to serve as their dedicated public information officer (PIO) and work with the local media.

The WSDOT's involvement in public education through media relations has improved considerably over the past six years. By placing more emphasis on providing clear messages to the public and the media, the WSDOT has evoked a favorable response. To show their support, the media has increased coverage of planned news events and seeks out the director and members of the WSDOT for information on department activities and initiatives. What's more, WSDOT's visibility on television and coverage on the radio to promote traffic safety became – and still is – much more apparent than in the past.

## **Moving Forward: Washington's Evolving Safety Plan**

### **The Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP)**

The foundation of Washington's current SHSP is the plan first developed in the year 2000 which had introduced the concept of a zero traffic fatality goal. Drawing on principles from existing programs, the plan was based upon bringing traffic safety partners together, as well as coordinating a statewide vision of safety and common goals. In partnership with State, local, and private agencies, the WTSC created a blueprint that changed the way people perceived what could be accomplished to reduce traffic fatalities in the future.

Under the WTSC organizational structure, and with the prior experience of drafting the 2000 strategic plan, Washington was uniquely positioned to develop the SHSP required in 2005 by the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU).

After reviewing the 2000 plan and researching best practices, the Department of Health, the WSP, and the Department of Licensing were brought together with the WTSC and the WSDOT to form the initial working group to develop the new SHSP. With the WTSC and the WSDOT leading the effort, the group completed an in-depth analysis of the crash data, and reviewed existing planning documents to create a draft plan that was then shared with other State agency partners.

After the State agencies provided input into the plan, the draft was shared with 47 of the State's traffic safety partners including State and Federal agencies, community, local and regional agencies, tribal nations, and private agencies and organizations. With input from these partners – and a review of 11 years worth of crash data – a final plan was developed that identified 22 emphasis areas (grouped into four areas of priority) that would have the most impact toward achieving Washington's goal of zero fatalities. Listed below are the four priority areas:

1. Impaired Driving and Speed
2. Occupant Protection, Run-Off-Road Collisions, Intersection Collisions, and Traffic Data Systems
3. Young Drivers, Distracted and Drowsy Drivers, Unlicensed Drivers, Pedestrian Safety, Motorcycle Safety, Commercial Vehicle Safety, Head-On Crashes, and Emergency Medical Services
4. Older Drivers, Aggressive Drivers, Bicycle Safety, Pupil School Bus Transportation, Safer Work Zones, Wildlife Collisions, Vehicle-Train Crashes, Integrated, Interoperable Communications

By addressing the top priorities first, the WTSC, the WSDOT, and their partners have focused resources on the most significant issues and, in the process, mitigated the effects of collisions identified in the other lower priority areas.

After establishing these main concerns, the working group turned their focus to the process of selecting research-based, data-driven strategies to address them. As a part of this process – and to confirm whether the identified countermeasures were proven – the group used two primary sources: the national SHSP developed by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) and *Countermeasures that Work: A Highway Safety Countermeasures Guide for State Highway Safety Offices* produced by the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA) for NHTSA. Each of the State and local program strategies cited in the plan are tied to the Target Zero goals.

Collaboration across agency lines and the focus of resources in partnerships between State and local agencies are key SHSP strategies to obtain meaningful results on specific roadway segments. The existing Corridor Safety Program and the Community Traffic Safety Task Forces are identified within the SHSP to assist with these goals.

It is important to note that it was the current WSDOT secretary of transportation that recognized and supported addressing driver behavior as the top priority over engineering in the SHSP. And, to support the SHSP, the WTSC has realigned internal

staff assignments by identifying a program manager to oversee three of the emphasis areas in the top two SHSP priorities: impaired driving, speed and occupant protection.

### **SHSP Accountability**

Washington's well-structured system of agency accountability helps to ensure that agencies follow through with the implementation of identified strategies and, therefore, increase the potential to achieve the SHSP goals. To facilitate this process, all State agencies report directly to the governor through a system of Government Management Accountability and Performance (GMAP). GMAP focuses on performance measurements and priority-based budgeting.

As part of the GMAP process, the WSDOT publishes a quarterly document entitled *Measures, Markers, and Milestones*. Also referred to as the *Gray Notebook*, the document provides in-depth reports on agency and transportation system performance. The *Gray Notebook* is also posted on the WSDOT web site, and is accessible to the public, legislators, and transportation organizations.

The WSP has aligned the SHSP performance measures within their own system of Accountability Driven Leadership. Through this process, activities and achievements toward reducing impaired driving and speed related crashes within each district are required to be reported by the district captains to bureau chiefs, and ultimately to the WSP Chief.

### **SHSP Evaluation**

For each of the emphasis areas identified in the SHSP, fatalities and fatality rate data have been charted with trend lines going back to 1993 and projected through 2012. Annual goals for each emphasis area have been identified for that time period as well.

A formal system of evaluation for the overall SHSP has not yet been established. A specific evaluation plan with interim goals is under development. In the interim, Washington's well developed system of agency and program accountability will play a key role in assuring that the SHSP implementation moves forward and progress is tracked. Additionally, as each WTSC partner agency develops strategies to implement the plan, evaluation of those activities will be undertaken as part of each agency's regular program oversight responsibilities.

The SHSP will be reviewed annually at a designated time that aligns best with the annual budget process. This coordination should result in a higher likelihood that funding will be available on a timely basis to support the critical needs of the SHSP. As the State moves forward to achieving the Target Zero goal, the SHSP will continue to be a solid foundation for both planning and the performance measurement of statewide safety initiatives.

### *III. Conclusion*

There are many lessons to be learned by Washington’s successful experience. Grounded by the strong support of the governor, the WTSC has provided a beacon of leadership and accountability which crosses State and local boundaries and creates a culture of traffic safety. By pointing to the results which have been achieved in Washington, a solid case for creating a similar commission can be made by other States. Additional key elements which have enhanced the commission’s ability to achieve significant reductions in fatality rates include: broad-based representation at the State and local level, close working relationships with the legislative committees which have safety policy and funding responsibilities, and, commitment to a clearly communicated and aggressive safety goal.

A unique factor in Washington - which may be more difficult to replicate and sustain - is the overall support voiced by the public for strong traffic safety policies and programs. The value of this endorsement is significant, not only to provide constituency backing for strong legislation, but also as a source of motivation for the State to seek and implement innovative strategies to address their safety challenges.

State agencies routinely work across organizational boundaries. Their history of building local programs and partnerships provides a strong basis to effectively deliver strategies in support of Target Zero. This uniting theme has guided the State to examine and improve their crash data system. Data is the backbone of SHSP planning, programming and evaluation to ensure optimal results and maximum return on investment.

Leadership at all levels has agreed to align resources to support the key traffic safety priorities. And, the State brings the message home to every individual through its comprehensive system of Government Management Accountability and regular reports on program performance to the general public.

Washington has greatly benefited from outstanding champions at all levels who have recognized the lifesaving value of a data-driven approach to traffic safety. Bolstered by strong traffic safety policies and programs, and carried out through the collaboration of State and local agencies, the system which has been created here moves forward with a united front and firm commitment to the ultimate achievement of their Target Zero goal.

### *IV. Summary of Critical Success Factors*

- **Independent commission structure with broad representation from State and local agencies**
- **Strength of partnerships among the State agencies and the governor**
- **Data-driven, research-based planning and programming**
- **Strong network of local community based programs and resources which are assisted by the State agencies**

- **Intensive legislative involvement and responsiveness to the WTSC and its member agencies**
- **Champions in the legislature who delivered key safety initiatives**
- **Strength of the House and Senate Transportation committees in management of all transportation funding and support of public policy issues**
- **A formal system of performance accountability to the governor, public, and legislature**
- **An aggressive Target Zero goal prior to and now within the current SHSP**

## *V. Epilogue*

Despite the strong programs that have developed at the State and local level, the State’s agencies are continually challenged to maintain a high level of focus on improving traffic safety. The following list identifies the most frequently cited potential “threats” to the continuing success of Washington’s traffic safety program.

**TABLE 3. POTENTIAL THREATS TO WASHINGTON’S TRAFFIC SAFETY FUTURE**

<b>Potential Threats to Washington’s Traffic Safety Future</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inability to discover new and effective programs to reduce speed-related crashes</li><li>• Acquiring authority to conduct sobriety checkpoints – currently not allowed and requires a constitutional amendment</li><li>• Shift of future Federal safety funding during reauthorization from the States that are doing well to other less successful States or to new Federal priorities</li><li>• Potential for status-quo mentality and “resting on laurels”: will the State continue to try to make more gains after all of its goals have been met?</li><li>• Lack of the political will to enact public policy initiatives that may be more difficult to attain, i.e., automated enforcement</li><li>• Politically-driven repeals of key traffic safety laws including primary enforcement of the seat belt law and the mandatory all-rider motorcycle helmet law</li></ul>

## *VI. Sources*

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Target Zero – Strategic Highway Safety Plan 2000

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Washington State Corridor Safety Program

<http://www.corridorsafetyprogram.com/> (May 2007)

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<http://www.leg.wa.gov/legislature> (May 2007)

Washington Traffic Records Committee Creating & Coordinating a Shared Vision for Traffic Records

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[http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/News/2004/02/feb24\\_performancemeasures.htm](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/News/2004/02/feb24_performancemeasures.htm) (May 2007)

## ***VII. Interviewees***

Paul Bennett, Public Works Director, Lincoln County

Kathleen Davis, Director, Highways & Local Programs Division, WSDOT

Steve Lind, Deputy Director, WTSC

Chris Madill, Traffic Records Coordinator, WTSC

John Manix, Traffic Engineer, Vancouver City

Robin Mayhew, Program Manager, Puget Sound Regional Council

John Moffat, Regional Administrator, NHTSA NW

Don Petersen, Division Safety/Design Engineer, FHWA

Lowell Porter, Director, WTSC

Phil Salzberg, Research Investigator, WTSC

Ted Trepanier, State Traffic Engineer, WSDOT

Brian Ursino, Assistant Chief, WSP

Angie Ward, Program Manager, WTSC

## APPENDIX - CASE STUDY QUESTIONS FOR STATE VISIT

1. What convinced top leadership to embrace safety and coordinate efforts?
2. What were the processes used that brought about the institutionalization of safety?
3. How did safety become a focus for other agencies (i.e., MPOs, law enforcement, EMS)?
4. Who or what agencies were the champions for safety in the State and what did they do?
5. How are resources shared among State agencies and with local agencies (staff, technical information, and data)?
6. What types of public education efforts have been undertaken?
7. How has the State utilized partnerships in general, including the State's relationship with Federal partners?
8. What motivated elected officials to embrace traffic safety issues?
9. What have been the primary traffic safety regulatory and enforcement initiatives over the years?
10. How was the cost of safety initiatives balanced with other demands on resources?
11. What types of coordination and technical support are available for safety analysis and programming?
12. How was the process for developing the SHSP determined?
13. What agency is primarily accountable for oversight of the SHSP?
14. Are performance measures in place to measure the results of SHSP strategies?
15. What is the biggest threat to sustaining the traffic safety gains that have been made?

### Case Study Focus Areas

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Background Information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State demographics</li> <li>• Fatality number and rate targets</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Organizational Leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State agencies</li> <li>• Other government agencies</li> <li>• Champions</li> <li>• Resource sharing</li> <li>• Public education</li> <li>• Public involvement</li> <li>• Partnerships</li> <li>• Media</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Political Leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership</li> <li>• State safety legislation</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. Institutionalizing Safety <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DOT organizational structure</li> <li>• SHSP development process</li> <li>• Accountability</li> <li>• Participating agencies</li> <li>• Evaluation</li> <li>• Funding</li> <li>• Data analysis, quality and sharing</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
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