Introduction

Roadway engineering and driver behavior both affect crash statistics – so both are addressed in the Kansas Strategic Highway Safety Plan, or SHSP. The SHSP will drive the highway and traffic safety activities of the Kansas Department of Transportation, and through it, we hope to influence our member agencies and the public at large. Our goal is to reduce fatalities by at least half over 20 years. If the goal is met, the five-year average of 417 fatalities a year between 2005 and 2009 would fall to 208 or fewer between 2025 and 2029.

The SHSP works within the frame of the “4E’s” of highway (that is, all roadways) safety: engineering, enforcement, emergency medical services and education. Within this broad frame, each of the emphasis area teams, or EATs, will focus on a particular problem, risk or threat associated with roadway safety: roadway departure, occupant protection, intersections, impaired driving, teen drivers, older drivers and large commercial vehicles. The EATs will ponder, for example, how to communicate to those opposed to centerline rumble strips that those grooves in the pavement actually save lives, how to convince a 28-year-old rural Kansan to wear a seat belt in his pick-up truck and how to teach parents the proper use of a booster seat. Education will be crucial to success.

The education support team was therefore convened to coordinate and support the educational efforts required to help the SHSP succeed. Creation of this team followed the convening of two other teams to support the EATs, one to provide the groups with information (the data support team) and another to help coordinate efforts on locally owned roads (the local roads team).

The education team will identify the tools, networks and platforms that will help other teams distribute their messages, conduct their training and share their resources. Potential roles include developing a system by which to distribute messages and facilitating public outreach, education and marketing campaigns.

The team, which first met Jan. 23, 2012, is represented by the following agencies:

- Kansas Traffic Safety Resource Office (KTSRO)
- Kansas Highway Patrol (KHP)
- KU Transportation Center
- Kansas Department of Aging & Disability Services
- Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE)
- Safe Kids Kansas
- Kansas Emergency Nurses Association (KENA)
- Boys & Girls Clubs of Topeka
- Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT)

Some of the new strategies discussed below—specifically, a tiered communications network, a user-friendly website “hub” for traffic safety information and a safety calendar—will serve several purposes such as: the dissemination of research on behavioral and engineering approaches to reducing traffic fatalities; publicizing of engineering successes; educating drivers about new traffic laws; providing resources to locals; and promoting public involvement of Kansans with an interest in safety.
The Kansas Traffic Safety Resource Office, or KTSRO, is the educational arm of the Kansas Department of Transportation Traffic Safety Section.

The mission of KTSRO is to provide public information and education to protect Kansans from avoidable injury or death on Kansas roadways. Together with many partners, KTSRO focuses on measures dealing with novice drivers, increasing seat belt use, preventing drunken driving and underage drinking and raising motorcycle safety awareness. KTSRO is an extension of KDOT providing their resources, materials and traffic safety information through a physical office located at 2930 SW Wanamaker Drive, Topeka, KS, (800-416-2522) and on the web at www.ktsro.org.

**Educating Drivers: A Lifetime Course**

To define the word “educate,” dictionaries often mention schooling, training, instruction. But to make good driving decisions, new drivers need education from many sources, including parents, law enforcement officials and more experienced peers and siblings. Driving decisions may be based on law (specifying, say, who needs to wear a seatbelt or the steps to get a driver’s license) or technique (such as how to drive through a roundabout).

Driving decisions also may be affected by more informal sources – such as the repeated retelling, within a community, of a story or stories. Or it may be shaped by more novel approaches, such as that taken by Crawford County (see “A Seatbelt-Use Program Goes Viral”). Yet for the most part, in the realm of driving, the word “education” refers to systemic efforts to positively influence people’s behavior through educational campaigns and programs. In general, the most effective public education strategies are those tied to a specific activity.
For Every Safety Restraint, There Is a Season

A newborn’s arrival into a family is a great teaching moment – among other things, about the use of safety restraints.

KDOT conducts observational safety belt usage surveys annually. In 2011, children – from newborns to age 4 – were observed to be properly restrained 97 percent of the time. In part, that’s because hospitals educate new parents about the use of car seats before sending a newborn home.

Unfortunately, this figure drops to 77 percent for kids between ages 5 and 9. It’s just harder to reach parents when the child is transitioning from a car seat to a booster seat or later from booster seat to seat belt.

At that point, parents need to learn booster seats work by raising a child up so the lap and shoulder belt are positioned safely. Their use reduces the risk of injury by 58 percent.

Knowing this, the Occupant Protection EAT has a strategy: It’s promoting curricula such as Booster to Belts and Safety Break! The education team will advise the Occupant Protection EAT on ways to implement these strategies.

A Seatbelt-Use Program Goes Viral

Getting teenagers to use seatbelts is tough. One Kansas county got more kids to buckle up by getting them involved in creating a program and by using sugar rather than vinegar to change their behavior.

In 2008, when law enforcement officers visited every school in Crawford County and gave safety talks there, county teens had one of the state’s lowest compliance rates for seatbelt use. But by the end of the 2008-2009 school year, the average increase in seatbelt use there was 16.3 percent.

Today, in more than a third of all Kansas counties, at least one school uses the program, which is described in detail below.

Representatives from the Crawford County sheriff’s office, Kansas Highway Patrol and Kansas Department of Transportation based their pilot program on two assumptions. The first: If students are involved in creating the program, they’ll be more invested in its success. The second: Both the threat of consequences and the offer of rewards work best when you’re trying to change behavior.

Students became creators when they were asked to nominate different names and slogans for the program. In the end, Seat Belts Are for Everyone, or SAFE, won the most votes. Students also designed a pledge card, which recognized each of the six Crawford County schools participating in the program.

Law enforcement officials would visit schools, address students, then follow up with enforcement of seat belt laws, typically for a week following their visit.

Meanwhile, various agencies or offices were approached for contributions to fund rewards to teenagers who signed pledge cards promising to use seat belts. Students could sign the cards each month to be eligible for a drawing.

Of the 1,875 students in the county, an additional 306 – or 16.3 percent – were using seatbelts by the end of the school year. Today, there are SAFE programs operating in 38 Kansas counties. For more details, go here to learn more.
Educators who seek to have an impact need to keep the following questions in mind as they design programs.

- Who is your primary target audience?
- How do you reach this audience through all the background “noise”?
- If there are several audiences, what’s the best medium for reaching each one?
- How do you measure your impact?
- There are many messengers. Who is the best for communicating yours?
- There are many messages. What’s yours?
- How are changes in communications media affecting education?

How we answer these questions will determine the communication strategies we select and the messages we dispatch.

Goals and Strategies

The Education Support Team has set three goals. It seeks to

1. Reach drivers and those who influence them (police and lawmakers, for example) by developing a communications infrastructure
2. Maintain a statewide traffic safety hub of information, training and resources
3. Support partners in traffic safety

Goal 1: Reach drivers and those who influence them by developing a communications infrastructure

Current strategies:

- Utilize social media like Facebook and Twitter to draw people to the KTSRO website.
- Reach more audiences with our message.
  - Background: We use social media because teenagers and the young are an important audience to reach. The question now is prioritizing other audiences for messaging.

New strategy:

- Develop a tiered network of organizations and individuals to deliver messages to the target audiences
  - Background: Messages delivered to the wrong audiences fall on deaf ears. KDOT public affairs managers and KHP public resource officers work hard to develop and maintain regional networks. But the audience for news of an engineering approach to prevent vehicles from leaving the roadway may be much different from an audience that needs to hear that car seats are safer than laps for children. We want to make certain that our message, whatever its form – news release, web link or public service spot – reaches its target audience. The network route a message takes will depend on the EAT that develops it; the media best suited to its distribution; and the target audience, such as, for example, the trauma community. We will specify audiences, identify partner agencies and create networks as needed to implement education strategies that emerge from the EATs.
  - Method: project
  - Costs: none
  - Lead agency and contact: KDOT, Traffic Safety Section
  - Challenges: accepting the limits of our reach
  - Target date: ongoing
Future strategy:

- Meet with media representatives to brainstorm about media and messages that will give us access to our target audiences.

**KDOT’s Voice in Kansas**

Send only meaningful information.
Don’t waste words.
KDOT observes those rules to deliver its messages effectively to – and through – media.
Statewide messages typically come from KDOT headquarters in Topeka.
Regional messages originate from six district offices, each with its own public affairs manager, or PAM.
Questions?
For phone numbers, click here and search for the words “public affairs director” and “public affairs manager.”
Goal 2: Maintain a statewide traffic safety hub of information, training and resources

New strategies:

♦ Create a domain and website, to be called Safekan, as the central repository for safety information.
  ♦ Background: Websites facilitate public outreach. A Safekan website, frequently updated and user-friendly, will be the portal for all Kansas traffic and roadway safety information, beginning with this SHSP. The “Kansas Driving: Safe. Not Sorry” road kit is an example of the kind of information that could be made available on the site. Designed by KDOT to assist partners in making safe driving presentations, the kit contains brochures, pamphlets and videos. After an update, these could be provided online.
  ♦ Method: project
  ♦ Costs: TBD
  ♦ Performance measure: site visits
  ♦ Lead agency and contact: KDOT, Bureau of Traffic Safety & Technology
  ♦ Challenges: securing funding to maintain a site and steering traffic to it
  ♦ Target date: 2013

♦ Create an electronic safety calendar that helps safety partners keep track of such scheduled safety activities as campaigns and trainings.
  ♦ Background: The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has a communications calendar for traffic safety advocates. The Local Technical Assistance Program has a training calendar for local public works agencies. The American Trauma Society celebrates Trauma Awareness Month in May; the 2012 campaign was “Decide to Drive: Arrive Alive.” KDOT promotes “Put the Brakes on Fatalities Day.” With many agencies scheduling traffic and roadway safety activities, a single calendar available to everyone would help both those planning and participating in activities. It would also help minimize redundancy in events, better coordinate messaging, and better align the communication and education activities of all the EATs.
  ♦ Method: project
  ♦ Costs: TBD
  ♦ Performance measure: periodic surveys of agencies to evaluate its usefulness
  ♦ Lead agency and contact: Kansas Traffic Safety Resource Office
  ♦ Challenges: securing input from partner agencies to keep the calendar current
  ♦ Target date: 2013
Goal 3: Support partners in traffic safety

New strategy:

- Develop a checklist tool for the EATs to use when implementing their education strategies.
  - Background: Sometimes the hardest part about launching an initiative is knowing where to begin. A checklist tool developed by the education team will give practitioners guidance about how to design an education strategy.
  - Method: project
  - Costs: TBD
  - Lead agency and contact: Kansas Traffic Safety Resource Office
  - Challenges: anticipating the different needs of each EAT
  - Target date: 2013