



COUNTY ROAD ASSOCIATION OF MICHIGAN

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PRESS RELEASE

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Michigan's County Road Commissions Helps Put the Brakes on Fatalities

Lansing, Mich. – In an effort to educate motorists on the importance of traffic safety, Michigan's County Road Commissions are participating in the annual Put the Brakes on Fatalities Day®, which is slated for October 10, 2009.

Put the Brakes on Fatalities Day® was first held in 2001, with the goal of informing the public on the major causes of traffic fatalities and their avoidance. The 2009 theme is "Don't be Driven to Distraction- Drive to Arrive."

Approximately 110 of our fellow citizens are killed in the US every single day- one fatality every 13 minutes. Michigan experiences approximately 980 traffic fatalities annually; a number road commissions would like to see reduced!

"Participating in this national education campaign allows road commissions to get information to motorists that could reduce these statistics," John Niemela, Director of the County Road Association of Michigan said. "Even one traffic related death is too many!"

Studies show that increased investment in road and bridge improvements at the local level saves lives. Making road lanes and shoulders wider, adding medians and improving bridges are just a few of the improvements that have been shown to cut fatalities significantly.

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The Federal Highway Administration has found that every \$100 million invested in highway safety improvements will result in approximately 145 fewer traffic fatalities over a 10-year period. Despite this fact, transportation funding in Michigan has decreased significantly in recent years.

“Michigan Transportation Fund revenues have fallen to 1998 levels requiring state and local road agencies to make deep cuts,” Niemela said. “Some of these cuts have a direct impact on the safety of our state and local road and bridge system. We have county road agencies that are unable to apply for all available federal safety improvement project grants because they do not have the required matching funds.”

“County road agencies are doing everything they can to keep roads safe for travel with the level of funding available,” Niemela said. “As transportation revenues continue to decline, motorists must take a more active role in ensuring their safety. Drivers should ensure that everyone in their vehicle is buckled-up on every trip, that speeds are not excessive for road conditions, and avoid distractions like talking or texting on a cell phone while driving.”

The level of winter maintenance services across the state decreased in 2008. Harsh winters and tight budgets forced MDOT and local road agencies to plow less and reduce the amount of salt and other de-icing materials used. Even with these reductions, state and local road agencies had little funding left for mowing and brush control, an important traffic safety tool to ensure motorists have proper visibility.

“Across the state, reductions in staff and overtime and the inability to replace aging equipment have made it more difficult for road agencies to plow all roads in a timely manner,” Niemela said. “We now know that talking on a cell phone or texting while driving can be as dangerous as driving drunk. As we head into winter it is more important than ever for motorists to make a conscious effort to limit distractions and focus on the responsibility of driving.”

In November 2008, the legislatively approved and gubernatorial appointed Transportation Funding Task Force (TF2) recommended that the legislature increase transportation funding. Implementing this proposal would allow Michigan road agencies to make safety improvements that could save 174 lives per year!

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“There has been little action in Lansing to increase transportation funding,” Niemela said. “There is so much more we could do to improve the safety of our road system if we had the additional funding. However, we cannot wait for road improvements to increase safety. Motorists must become a part of the solution by reducing distractions, not driving while drunk or drowsy, driving appropriate speeds and being patient in work zones or other areas where traffic is slowed.”

While many factors contribute to deadly motor vehicle traffic crashes, driver behavior plays a major role. The County Road Association of Michigan and Michigan’s 83 county road agencies remind you to slow down, buckle up, drive sober – and at all times, drive as if your life depends on it! “Don’t be Driven to Distraction- Drive to Arrive.”

The County Road Association of Michigan represents Michigan's 83 county road agencies that together are responsible for more than 75% of Michigan roads.

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October 10, 2009, is *Put the Brakes on Fatalities Day*®

What is Put the Brakes on Fatalities Day®?

- The first annual **Put the Brakes on Fatalities Day**® was held on October 10, 2001. Its goal was and remains today to deliver messages to the public about the major causes of transportation fatalities - chiefly highway fatalities - and their avoidance, in an upbeat fashion.
- The goal of the program is to reduce fatalities, address the need for improvements to our roadways, our vehicles and basic driver behavior.




What do the statistics reveal?

- **Nearly 40,000 traffic fatalities occur every year in the U.S., and nearly 2.5 million are injured. That's about 110 fatalities every single day—one fatality every 13 minutes.**
- Highway crashes are the leading cause of death of people 3 through 6, and 8 through 34 years of age and are the cause of more permanent impairments than any other type of accident.
- About 12,000 people are killed annually in traffic crashes involving collisions with a fixed object such as a tree, guardrail, utility pole, mail box, curb or light or support pole.
- **Every \$100 million invested in highway safety improvements will result in approximately 145 fewer traffic fatalities over a 10-year period.**




How do local road and bridge improvements impact safety?

- **Studies show that increased investment in road and bridge improvements at the local level save lives.** Making road lanes and shoulders wider, adding medians and improving bridges are just a few of the improvements that have been shown to cut fatalities significantly.
- Listed are key local road and bridge improvements evaluated over a 20-year period by FHWA and the related reduction in fatality rates.

Improvements at Intersections Reduction in Fatality Rate





 turning lanes and traffic channelization	47 percent
 sight distance improvements	56 percent
 new traffic signals	53 percent

Bridge Improvements

 widening a bridge	49 percent
 new bridge	86 percent
 upgrade bridge rail	75 percent



Reduction in Fatality Rate

Roadway Improvements

 construct median for traffic separation	73 percent
 widen or improve shoulder	22 percent
 realign roadway	66 percent
 groove pavement for skid treatment	33 percent

Reduction in Fatality Rate

Roadside Improvements

 upgrade median barrier	66 percent
 new median barrier	63 percent

Reduction in Fatality Rate

Saving Lives is No Accident

The follow are just a few of the ways Michigan's state and local road agencies are saving lives:

- Safety Improvements to Narrow Roadways and Bridges Can Save Lives.
- Rumble Strips Can Dramatically Reduce Roadway Crashes. "Rumble strips are one of the most effective ways to keep drivers on the road. Special rumble strips, equipped with a Sonic Nap Alert Pattern (SNAP), produce a distinct warning sound and vibration that alert drivers whose vehicles are drifting off the roadway.
- Improvements at Intersections Reduce Crashes and Injuries.

Increasing Transportation Funding Will Save Lives

Enacting the recommendations of the governor's Transportation Funding Task Force (TF2) to double transportation funding will save lives! FHWA has found that every \$100 million spent on needed highway safety improvements will result in 145 fewer traffic fatalities over a 10 year period. Michigan has about 980 highway deaths per year. **Investment from this package could save 174 lives per year!**

- Michigan Transportation Fund revenues have fallen to 1998 levels, while construction costs over the past decade have skyrocketed;
- Reductions in funding have caused the delay and cancelation of safety improvement projects across the state;

- Many counties have not applied for federal safety grants due to a lack of matching funds;
- Road commissions have been doing more with less for many years and have cut to the point where there is nothing left that does not impact the level of service;
- **Road agencies have had to make deep cuts, many of which have a direct or indirect impact on the safety of our state and local road and bridge system:**
 - State and local road agencies have reduced the level of winter maintenance services, plowing less and only salting intersections, hills and curves;
 - Reductions in staff and overtime for winter maintenance have decreased the ability for road agencies to clear roads in a timely manner. Continued reductions in funding will eventually impede road agencies ability to keep roads open for emergency vehicles. Delays during the “golden hour” after a serious traffic crash increase the chance of fatalities; and
 - State and local road agencies have reduced mowing and brush removal as a way to reduce costs. Although this may seem like an insignificant cut, brush control is a vital safety tool to ensure motorists have proper visibility.

*Note- This information was provided by the Put the Brakes on Fatalities Day campaign. Highway safety information on this fact sheet is based on data obtained by The Road Information Program from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.