



ROAD SAFETY THINK TANK

ONTARIO

A Message from the Road Safety Partners

Road safety is a significant global issue that has multi-dimensional impacts on the viability of every country in the world. Transportation-related matters affect all aspects of society, including the economy, productivity, workforce, environment, health and safety and overall community and individual satisfaction.

In Ontario, road safety has long been recognized as important and many successful initiatives have been implemented. Continuous improvement in road safety is an important challenge that requires collective initiatives, strategies and co-operation at multiple levels of government, allied agencies, community and business to achieve breakthroughs for the continued wellbeing of society.

An alliance of Road Safety Partners, consisting of representatives from the Ontario Ministries of Transportation and Labour, Insurance Bureau of Canada, the Transportation Health and Safety Association of Ontario and the Ontario Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, have recognized the opportunity to improve overall road safety outcomes. The Road Safety Partners will collaborate to achieve breakthroughs in road safety through strategic initiatives directed at social marketing/ education, legislation, enforcement and infrastructure.

The Road Safety Think Tank held on October 5, 2004 was the initial step in bringing together the safety partners, researchers and other experts to analyze how we can improve road safety, with a particular focus on drowsy, distracted and aggressive driving. The purpose of the Road Safety Think Tank was:

- To learn what the research is telling us about influences on road safety;
- To look at some programs that have been successful in improving driver safety; and,
- To determine critical success factors that will be used as the basis in forming strategies and action plans.

Highlights of Research Presentations

Driving is a complex task involving distinct cognitive, perceptual, motor and decision-making skills that requires sustained alertness for safe performance. Interaction with the environment while driving requires concentration and attention.

The Road Safety Think Tank researcher presentations focused on distracted, aggressive and drowsy driving, which alone or in combination, can impede safe and optimal driving performance.

DRIVING BEHAVIOUR

1 DROWSY DRIVING RISK FACTORS

- Working night shift
- Less than 6 hours sleep per night
- Daytime sleepiness
- Holding multiple jobs
- Overly active lifestyle
- Driving after awake more than 15 hours
- Long duration driving
- Medical conditions that may contribute to drowsy driving

EFFECTS

- Impaired reaction time, judgement and vision
- Problems with information processing and short-term memory
- Decreased performance, vigilance and motivation
- Increased moodiness and aggressive behaviours
- Increased microsleeps or 2-3 second sleep episodes
- Increased risk of collisions

2 DISTRACTED DRIVING SOURCES OF DISTRACTION

- Outside person, object or event
- Adjusting radio, cassette, CD, climate controls
- Other occupants, passengers, children
- Eating, drinking, smoking while driving
- Using either handheld or hands-free cell phone
- On-board telematics ie. navigational systems, wireless internet, e-mail

EFFECTS

- Delay in information processing with the greater cognitive load resulting in fewer eye movements, more time looking straight ahead, less time checking instruments and mirrors
- Driving distractions decrease capacity to focus on the primary task of driving
- More instances of hard braking
- Increased risk of collision

3 AGGRESSIVE DRIVING CHARACTERISTICS

- Almost any driver can exhibit aggressive behaviours
- Driving or attempting to drive at a speed different than the prevailing speed
- Directing verbal or nonverbal expressions of anger designed to encourage retaliation by other drivers
- Deliberately ignoring traffic controls, especially by increasing speed or failing to slow for the controls
- Driving in a way that attempts to gain an unfair advantage over other drivers
- Influenced by systemic factors, e.g. time of day (rush hour), perceived level of traffic congestion
- May result from sleep deprivation and/or tremendous stress

EFFECTS

- Increase in violent traffic disputes that may involve intentional injury
- Aggressive drivers overestimate their perceptual and motor skills while driving
- Increased risk of collision
- Speeding

Programs in Other Jurisdictions

Motor vehicle safety is a major global issue and Canada, like other nations, has established a vision and targets to reduce the toll of injuries and deaths on our roads. Initiatives that have been effective, such as the Alberta Mission Possible program, take a multi-factorial, systems approach to road safety, and engage a broad cross section of partners. Workplace-based programs can be highly effective in promoting safe driving both on and off the job.

Exploring Solutions

In group discussions, Think Tank participants considered the following mechanisms to improve road safety.

SOCIAL MARKETING/EDUCATION

The public perceives that drowsy, aggressive and distracted driving are serious problems. For example speeding, tailgating, unsafe passing, cell phone use and failing to signal are frequently cited as road safety issues. Social marketing and education campaigns can be used to promote a culture of individual and collective responsibility for safe driving, encouraging drivers to realize that they share the road with “people, not cars”. Education campaigns can also address employers’ roles in influencing how their workers drive.

LEGISLATION

There is a need to identify perceived gaps in current legislation and improvements that could address the three factors of drowsy, distracted and aggressive driving.

ENFORCEMENT

Strong enforcement is important in holding drivers accountable for driving responsibly. Enhancements to the existing measures, including new ones, should be explored. Police services should continue to maintain traffic enforcement as a priority.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The road transportation system in Ontario is extremely complex and requires inter-related analysis of the road, the driver and environmental factors in order to propose strategies for designing safer vehicles, roads and traffic management systems. Success will depend on engaging many different groups from government, industry and society in a coordinated program of road safety.



Outcomes and Next Steps

With the valuable input from the Think Tank group discussions, the Road Safety Partners will collaborate to develop a strategy to achieve a positive difference in road safety. Research and existing successful programs will be reflected in recommendations on social marketing/education, legislation, enforcement and infrastructure.

Road safety is a significant challenge that requires the commitment of many players. The existing partnership will be expanded to engage other key partners in an integrated long-term approach to road safety.

The Road Safety Partners have benefited greatly from the information and ideas presented and discussed at the think tank.

We are now establishing working committees to strengthen collaboration and strategically co-ordinate successful road safety programs.

The following areas will be pursued:

COORDINATED DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The Road Safety Partners will take a coordinated approach to collecting detailed data to better identify causal factors that contribute to motor vehicle collisions and fatalities. Good quality data are also critical for establishing baselines and measuring the success of our initiatives.

MARKETING AND EDUCATION

From a review of research, data and the think tank findings, we will identify key messages that can be promoted through education and social marketing. A review of marketing material will be undertaken simultaneously to utilize existing promotional materials and identify messages common to the partnership. By expanding our partnership we will widen the audience for our messaging.

PROGRAMS TO PROMOTE ROAD SAFETY

The Road Safety Partners will explore opportunities to collaborate on road safety initiatives such as programs that address young drivers, trucking and the workplace.

RESEARCH AND ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

The partners will analyze the economic impact of unsafe driving, including its effects on productivity loss and health care costs. This analysis will help reinforce the social and financial benefits of enhanced road safety efforts.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

The Road Safety Partners recognize that a long-term strategic approach is needed to address road and motor vehicle design and technology, which play key roles in road safety.

