

Priority Level Four

Older Road Users

By 2030, over one and a half million people in Washington will be 65 or older – twice the number of people in that age group today. Washington State will continue to monitor data pertaining to older drivers and develop strategies to plan for an aging population with the goal of enabling older drivers to retain as much mobility as possible for as long as possible when consistent with their safety and the safety of others.

Between 2006-2008, older road users accounted for 120 (7.0%) of traffic fatalities. Although age itself does not determine driving capabilities, older drivers can experience declines in their sensory, cognitive, or physical functioning that can put them at an increased risk of involvement in traffic crashes.

Many highway design and traffic control elements can be improved to better serve their needs. WSDOT has been using enlarged road signs and improved nighttime reflectivity to assist older drivers. In addition, the WSDOT design manual has promoted intersections that meet at 90 degrees, in part to improve safety for older drivers.

Additionally, older drivers can work with occupational therapists through programs such as AAA’s “Carfit,” to make sure their vehicles have necessary equipment such as extra mirrors or hand controls to deal with their driving limitations. Older drivers may extend their ability to drive through the use of medical treatments such as eyeglasses or cataract surgery.

Finally, older drivers who can no longer drive safely in some situations may need to have their driver’s licenses restricted or revoked. Establishing a State Medical Advisory Board to establish medical guidelines for driving and determining the conditions when drivers with medical conditions (regardless of age) can still safely drive, could help determine when driver license restrictions or revocation might be needed. While such strategies are not part of this document, Washington State will continue to explore and develop effective programs for coping with an aging population.

Drowsy Drivers

Between 2006-2008, drivers who were drowsy contributed to 77 (4.5%) of fatal crashes. However, this category may be significantly under-reported due to the difficulty investigators experience in accurately identifying drowsy drivers. Currently, WSDOT is attempting to reduce fatalities and serious injuries from drowsy drivers through the use of rest areas, as well as installing cable median barrier, shoulder rumble strips, and centerline rumble strips. WSDOT is also working on a program to expand existing parking for heavy trucks to reduce the likelihood of heavy truck operators driving while they are tired.

Bicyclists

From 2006 to 2008, there were 30 fatal traffic collisions involving bicyclists (1.7% of the total). The 2008-2027 Washington State Bicycle Facilities & Pedestrian Walkways Plan establishes objectives and performance measures in each of the State’s five transportation areas as established in state law. The plan also sets a statewide goal of decreasing fatal and serious injury collisions involving bicyclists and pedestrians by 5% per year for the next 20 years, while doubling the amount of biking and walking. To achieve the goal, the number of fatal and serious injuries to bicyclists and pedestrians must be decreased from approximately 400 statewide to 150 or fewer by 2027. Strategies in the plan focus on:

- Making connections and improving bicycle facilities in urban areas where housing and employment mix.
- Reducing barriers to bicycling on higher speed, higher volume arterials.
- Improving and increasing connected, separated paths and trails.
- Increasing information about bicycle laws in Washington.
- Increasing how-to type training, and teaching safe cycling in Washington.

Priority Level Four

Safer Work Zones

Between 2006 and 2008, 21 traffic fatalities (1.2%) occurred in work zones. With regards to work zones on state routes, Washington State is continuing to improve work zone operations and driver behavior in work zones through training, education, and enforcement.

WSDOT is currently providing its employees training to help increase safety and mobility through the design and implementation of work zones. The agency is also updating guidance documents to reflect new federal rules on work zone safety and changes in WSDOT work zone policy, and has recently completed a work zone self-assessment with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). WSDOT is also promoting the use of barriers for separating workers from traffic, as well as new work zone safety related devices and technology, such as camera enforcement. WSDOT has also adopted a new work zone speed limit reduction policy.

Wildlife Collisions

Wildlife collisions accounted for nine fatalities (0.5%) between 2006-2008. To address this, Washington State will integrate safety elements during project scoping and development, designed to prevent wildlife-vehicle crashes.

Vehicle-Train Collisions

Vehicle-train crashes accounted for eight fatalities between 2006 and 2008, or 0.5% of the total. SAFETEA-LU provides a “set aside” for rail grade crossing safety and requires the State to use the set-aside funds for installing protective devices at railway-highway intersections.

School Bus-Related Collisions

School bus travel remains the safest way to send children to school and Washington State will continue to ensure that 100% of school buses receive safety inspections and school bus drivers receive training in vehicle dynamics, precision driving skills, obstacle avoidance, and evasive maneuvers. Most of the fatalities involving school buses have been occupants of other vehicles or non-motorists. Only one school-bus occupant was killed in a collision between 1994 and 2008, a school-bus driver in 1996.