THE State of SAFETY IN THE REGION

JUNE 2008

Program Update and Legislative Review
Interim Report
State of Safety in the Region

Interim Report
Program Update & Legislative Review

June 2008

Houston–Galveston Area Council
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Traffic Safety staff at the Houston-Galveston Area Council would like to express their deep appreciation to all the members of the Regional Safety Council, our colleagues at TxDOT, TTI, Houston TranStar, and local governments, members of regional law enforcement agencies, and the dedicated employees and volunteers of the community service organizations throughout our region.

Without the tireless work of these persons and some many others our work would be in vain.
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Introduction

Since the publication of the 2007 State of Safety in the Region (SOSR) report, the Regional Safety Council and its subcommittees have been working diligently to formulate and implement initiatives to help reduce traffic injuries and fatalities in our region. This report serves as an interim update to the State of Safety report, presenting regional traffic safety activities, legislative action on transportation safety and accomplishments of the Regional Safety Council, its subcommittees, regional community organizations, governmental agencies at all levels, and H-GAC staff. Unfortunately, due to delays in the release of the State’s Crash Record Information System, a thorough analysis of the state of safety in the region could not be conducted. Upon the release of this data, a revised report will be released containing analysis on a variety of transportation-safety related topics.

As the 2007 report points out, the region has a severe traffic safety problem. In comparing the fatality data used in the initial SOSR report with the most recent fatality data available from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) we find that overall the number of fatal crashes and deaths has only declined slightly. The average number of fatal crashes from 1999 to 2001 was 565, while the average for 2004 to 2006 was 551, a 2.5% decrease. Likewise, average total fatalities from the same periods declined slightly as well, 626 versus 606, a 3.2% decrease. While any decrease in fatalities is good news, these numbers also mean that more work needs to be done to make the region’s highways and streets safer.

The Houston-Galveston area is experiencing exceptional growth. The US Census Bureau reports that the Houston metro area ranked fourth in overall population growth from 2006 to 2007. As budget constraints limit the capacity to build new roads, traffic safety will become a more pressing issue in our region. The cost of vehicle crashes in lives, property, time and money will become a burden our region can ill afford to pay, and therefore efforts to reduce the frequency and severity of such crashes will hopefully gain more currency with public institutions, the private sector and the general public.

The Regional Safety Council, our many partner organizations, and local governments are engaged in numerous activities to address intoxicated driving, aggressive driving, freight safety, and non-motorized traffic safety issues. At least 20 different initiatives have either been implemented or are under development. These efforts range from major law enforcement and public education campaigns to deployment of the latest technological innovations such as red light cameras.

The transportation safety problem is not one that will be solved overnight. It will not just require continued collaboration between the Regional Safety Council and the various law enforcement, engineering, and advocacy groups who deal with this problem on a daily basis. It will also involve changes from the Legislature to better enable these groups to address the problem. Most importantly, it will involve a change in how the general public chooses to interact and respect fellow drivers on the region’s roads.

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Regional Safety Council

In August 2005, the Transportation Policy Council (TPC) of the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) established the Regional Safety Council (RSC) to address the region’s increasing traffic safety issues. The RSC's mission is to advise and make recommendations to the TPC regarding traffic safety policy. In addition, the RSC is responsible for encouraging safety education, effective law enforcement, safety engineering, emergency service activities, and infrastructure investments to help reduce the number and severity of traffic crashes, injuries and fatalities in the region.

The RSC consists of 24 members from a broad spectrum of safety-related professions. Membership includes officials and professionals from local and State governments, transportation, law enforcement, health care, insurance, trucking, railroads and non-profit organizations involved in safety. The current members of the RSC, including ex-officio members is listed below.

The RSC initially met in February 2006 and formed subcommittees to concentrate on four safety issues that have significantly impacted the region. These issues were DUI/DWI crashes, Aggressive Driving, Freight Safety, and Safety Information Systems. A fifth subcommittee, Improving Bicycle, Pedestrian & Child Safety, was added in 2007 to address non-motorized modes of transportation, as well as issues affecting child safety. These subcommittees were tasked to develop proposals and initiatives to address transportation safety in their respective areas. These initiatives, which are in various stages of development and implementation, are discussed in detail later in this report.

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<th>Regional Safety Council Members</th>
<th>Ex-Oficio Members (Two-Year Term)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Allen Baity, Core Trucking of Texas</td>
<td>Alan Clark, H-GAC</td>
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<td>Council Member Adrian Garcia, City of Houston</td>
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<td>Chief Thomas Lambert, METRO</td>
<td>Carolyn Cook, Federal Railroad Administration</td>
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<td>Roger Schuler, John L. Wortham &amp; Son, L.P. Houston</td>
<td>Manuel Espinosa, Federal Motor Carriers Safety Administration</td>
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<td>Sheriff Charles Wagner, Brazoria County</td>
<td>Cherie Kittle, Federal Highway Administration</td>
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<td>Andy Mao, P.E., Harris County</td>
<td>Kenneth Copeland, National Highway Transportation Safety Administration</td>
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<td>Chief Deputy Chad Norvell, Fort Bend County, Precinct 4</td>
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<td>Captain Carl Driskell, Houston Police Department</td>
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<td>Joe Adams, Union Pacific</td>
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<td>Stuart Corder, P.E., TxDOT-Houston District</td>
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<td>Robert Benz, P.E., TTI</td>
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<td>Dr. Richard Bradley, LBJ Hospital</td>
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<td>Raymond Chong, P.E., City of Houston</td>
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<td>Captain Keith Dougherty, Baytown Police Department</td>
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<td>Anne O’Ryan, AAA-Texas</td>
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<td>Lee Jane Ream, P.E., City of Pasadena</td>
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<td>Dr. Rohit Shenoi, Texas Children’s Hospital</td>
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<td>Officer Paul Lassalle, Houston Police Department</td>
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<td>Flora Allen, MADD</td>
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<td>Ralph Granados, City of Missouri City</td>
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2007 State of Safety in the Region Report

In February 2007, the Regional Safety Council, based on work by its subcommittees, approved the first State of Safety in the Region report. This report was the first of its kind to provide a comprehensive review of traffic safety in the Houston-Galveston region. Utilizing Texas Department of Public Safety (TxDPS) data from 1999 to 2001, the 2007 SOSR report identified the critical traffic safety issues in the region and outlined strategies for addressing these problems.

The report focused on four major regional traffic safety problems: DWI/DUI crashes, aggressive driving, commercial motor vehicle safety, and safety information systems. A chapter is dedicated to each subject area, providing background information, statistical analysis and recommendations for addressing the issue.

The report made a total of 17 recommendations for improving safety in each of the four subject areas. While some of these recommendations can be addressed through local action, several require legislative approval before action can be taken. Following this section is a progress report reflecting the status in fulfilling these recommendations.

Table 1: 2007 State of Safety in the Region Recommendations

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<td>10. Create safety corridors on high-incidence roadways</td>
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Progress on Recommendations from the 2007 Report

1. Greater implementation of interlock technology
Currently, Texas law recognizes ignition interlock technology as an option for judges to implement in sentencing most DWI offenders. Implementation is only mandatory as a condition of bond or probation for subsequent DWI offenses or if the offender is convicted with a blood alcohol content (BAC) greater than 0.15, is under 21 years of age, or was on probation for Intoxication Assault or Manslaughter. The report recommended the initiation of educational campaigns for judges and prosecutors to encourage them to enforce the use of interlock devices. Two pieces of legislation (HB 934 & SB 437) introduced during the 80th Legislative Session would have mandated the use of interlock devices for all DWI convictions regardless of blood alcohol level. Both bills died in committee.

2. Elimination of Intoxicants Clause
Texas law currently allows insurance companies to deny payment of medical expenses for claimants who were injured while under the influence of alcohol. Repealing or modifying these laws would make it easier to identify and treat drunk drivers by eliminating hospitals’ concern for recovering costs. HB 634, proposed during the 80th Legislative Session, would have modified the law to mandate that insurers provide coverage. The legislation died in committee.

3. Modification of State Administrative License Revocation Laws
The 2007 report recommended that state law be amended to allow those convicted of DWI offenses to retain their driver’s licenses if they actively participate in and successfully complete a DWI Court program. This recommendation was made because as many as 75% of DWI offenders with suspended licenses continue to drive illegally, and nearly half of these drivers fail to reinstate their licenses when the suspension period has ended. HB 530, which passed during the 80th Legislative Session in 2007, streamlines the process for obtaining an occupation driver’s licenses provided the defendant is actively participating in and successfully completed at DWI Court program. While House Bill 530 increases the number of DWI Courts by reduces the county population requirement for mandatory DWI courts from 500,000 to 200,000 persons, the legislation does not make DWI Court available state-wide.

4. Barring Servers from Drinking on Duty
It is illegal for the owners, agents, or employees of an establishment that serves alcohol to be intoxicated while on the premises. However, state law does not prohibit those persons from consuming alcohol while at work. When servers consume alcohol, their judgment can be impaired and consequently they would not be able to adequately determine when their patrons have become intoxicated, and are probably less likely to recommend alternative means for these patrons to safely leave the premises. Moreover, these servers will become alcohol-impaired drivers themselves when they leave work, thus compounding the impaired driving problem. To date, no legislation has been introduced to eliminate this practice.
5. **Legalization of Sobriety Checkpoints**
Currently, state law enforcement agencies can not set up or operate sobriety checkpoints due to a ruling by the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals. The court’s ruling noted a lack of guidelines for sobriety checkpoint operations. Two bills introduced during the last legislative session (HB 253 & SB 59) proposed a set of guidelines based on NHTSA’s guidelines for operating a checkpoint. Both bills failed to make it out of committee.

6. **Funding Programs to prevent Underage Drinking**
H-GAC staff is currently supporting initiatives with several community organizations and law enforcement agencies to eliminate underage drinking. Members of several area coalitions who have worked with the RSC, including the Bay Area Council on Drugs and Alcohol, the Bay Area Alliance for Youth & Families, the Coalition for Behavioral Health Services-North, and the Southeast Harris Community Coalition, have received grants from the Texas Department of State Health Services to reach out to teen and college-age individuals to educate about the risks and dangers of underage and binge drinking. These groups have also been working with law enforcement to provide extra resources to crack down on this activity.

7. **Identify Problem Alcohol Establishments**
The report recommended conducting a study to (1) identify alcohol establishments with high numbers of DWI offenders as patrons, and (2) determine if there are areas where large numbers of DWI offenders reside. The ability to complete this work has been significantly delayed due to the lack of crash data from the state. In the meantime, H-GAC staff has been working with area coalitions to correlate establishment locations and crash locations in order to try and identify potential target areas for increased enforcement by local police and the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission (TABC), as well as to provide education.

8. **Implement Dynamic Speed Signs**
The Council recommended the implementation of radar-based speed limit signs that notify drivers of their speed in order to bring speeds within the limits. While many communities have utilized the signs in work zones and for temporary assignment, the Cities of West University and Sugar Land have installed these devices as more permanent fixtures. West University has seen a decrease in speeding since their implementation in 2005. The City of Sugar Land has seen mixed results, with fewer people adhering to the devices placed on the larger roadways.

9. **Promote Teen Road Safety Education**
The Council and H-GAC Staff have been working to promote creative teen safety education programs in the region. Staff has been working with the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) in promoting the Teens in the Drivers Seat program, a peer-to-peer initiative where high-school students create and teach their own program. Currently, two schools, Sweeny High School in Sweeny, Texas and Angleton High School have implemented the program. H-GAC has also worked with the Driver’s Edge program, a hands-on driver safety program geared towards teens, where participants receive in-car instruction from professional race-car drivers that is traditionally not taught in standard driver’s education program. Additional details on these programs are discussed on page 13.
10. Implement Safety Corridors
H-GAC staff has worked with the City of Pasadena and Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) to develop a safety corridor within the city. To date, three potential thoroughfares have been identified as potential candidates for the program. In addition, H-GAC has identified some potential funding that may be used for its implementation. A more thorough review of the corridors will be conducted to determine the best option and ascertain needed low-cost improvements for the corridor.

11. Expand Truck-restricted Lanes
The 2007 SOSR report recommended that TxDOT look into expanding truck-lane restrictions where deemed appropriate on the region’s freeway system. Providing some separation between commercial and passenger vehicles can improve safety by reducing potential conflicts. Currently, TxDOT has implemented truck-lane restrictions on IH-10 East, US 290, IH-45 North, and SH 225. There are no plans at this time to add further truck-lane restrictions.

12. Increase Commercial Motor Vehicle Enforcement
To date, no legislation has been introduced which would dedicate revenue from fines levied against commercial motor vehicle (CMV) operators to CMV enforcement. In 2007 the State Legislature did pass three bills (HB1638, HB 2077, & SB 545) that expanded the number of municipal law enforcement agencies that can apply for CMV Enforcement certifications. The Houston Police Department (HPD) was the first to utilize TxDOT’s Selective Traffic Enforcement Program (STEP) for commercial vehicle enforcement activities. In 2008, HPD and the Harris County Sheriff’s Office were two of five agencies in the state to receive this funding. Additional details on these programs are discussed on page 20.

13. Support Development of Truck-only Facilities
The report calls for the Council to support development of truck-only facilities either as part of the existing transportation infrastructure or as separate facilities. While the basis for this recommendation is sound, due to the current state-wide transportation fiscal crisis it is unlikely that existing truck-only facilities will be expanded or that separate facilities will be constructed.

The Improving Freight Safety Subcommittee and H-GAC staff is currently working on two freight safety education campaigns. The “NO-ZONE” campaign is directed towards drivers of passenger vehicles to heighten their awareness of the dangers of driving in the “blind spots” of commercial vehicles. This campaign will be two-fold, consisting of a media campaign with radio spots and billboards, as well as a campaign to provide 2’x4’ decals to trucking companies to display on their trucks that warn of the dangerous areas around a truck where passenger vehicles should avoid lingering. A Commercial Driver’s License (CDL) Poster/Placard was also developed to remind commercial vehicle operators of the behaviors that will result in revocation of their CDL license. These posters are intended to be placed in truck stops and restaurants frequented by truck drivers. Additional details on these programs are discussed on page 22.

15. Encourage Regional-level Data Sharing
The development and deployment of CRIS, and the subsequent future development of a regional crash record data repository at H-GAC will allow for the sharing of crash data in the region. However, there are aspects of the data that are not complete, requiring additional agreements.
Through research, it has been identified that traffic-related fatalities may be significantly undercounted in the region. In 2006, Harris County recorded over 40 percent more motor-vehicle related fatalities than NHTSA, which bases its figures on regional crash reports. H-GAC will be working with Vital Records departments in the region in order to develop more accurate fatality data.

16. Ensure Proper Data Collection
A survey of regional law enforcement was recently conducted to determine their crash data collection and reporting methods. Follow up surveys and interviews will be conducted to develop a comprehensive picture of current procedures. Moreover, it is not known at this time what effect the deployment of CRIS will have on future crash record submission requirements. For information about the survey please refer to page 29.

17. Setup a Regional Crash Information Clearinghouse
H-GAC is currently exploring the feasibility of establishing a regional crash data record database. The necessity and size of such a system will depend in part of the robustness and accessibility of the CRIS database. Until CRIS data are released, this project shall remain on-hold.
Review of the 80th Legislative Session

The 80th Legislative Session in 2007 proved to be a challenging one for transportation safety. While several bills did manage to be signed into law, many important safety-related bills failed to even receive a hearing in committee. The following is a synopsis of bills that passed and failed during the session.

**Aggressive/Unsafe Driving**

**Passed**

**HB 84** (Branch/Harless/Goolsby) - a.k.a. Katie’s Law requires drivers 85 years of age and above to pass a vision test to have their driver license renewed. Licenses will be valid for two years instead of six. Drivers age 79 and older are not allowed to renew their driver licenses electronically.

**HB 586** (Gonzalez Toureilles) prohibits a driver who is issued a speeding ticket and found guilty of driving at a speed of 95 miles per hour or higher from taking a driving safety class to dismiss the ticket.

**HB 3190** (Giddings) prohibits persons who have committed offenses such as vehicular manslaughter, driving under the influence, and leaving the scene of an accident from operating a school bus for 10 years after the offense; requires school bus operators to wear seat belts if the operator’s seat is equipped with such restraints; prohibits the operation of a school bus if the number of persons inside the bus exceeds the manufacturer’s design capacity for the vehicle or if the bus’ door is open; authorizes a school bus operator to prohibit a passenger from standing or sitting on the floor of a bus or anywhere that is not a seat; requires a school bus evacuation training program and requires a school district to train all of its students and teaching staff in the process of emergency school bus evacuation at least twice a year.

**SB 369** (Williams) prohibits the use of blurring or reflective matter on a license plate that significantly impairs the readability of the state name and license plate numbers and letters; prohibits the use of material or an apparatus that alters or obscures one-half or more of the state name; and prohibits using material that obscures the license plate number or plate color.

**Failed**

**HB 985** (Isett) would have allowed local authorities to enforce compliance with speed limits or a traffic-control signal on a highway under its jurisdiction by an automated traffic-control system.

**SB 154** (Wentworth) would have prohibited a motor vehicle driver from using a cell phone unless the car is stopped or the cell phone is used with a hands-free device.
Driving While Intoxicated/Under the Influence

Passed

**HB 530** (Madden) requires DWI Courts to be established in counties with populations over 200,000. Previous legislation placed the limit at 550,000.

**HB 1049** (Phillips) adds the offense of manslaughter, in instances where a motor vehicle was used in the commission of the offense, to the list of offenses that, upon final conviction of the offense, result in the automatic suspension of the person’s driver's license.

**SB 153** (Wentworth) makes it an offense for the accompanying licensed passenger of a driver with a learner’s permit to sleep, be intoxicated or to engage in any activity that prevents the passenger from observing and responding to the actions of the driver of the vehicle.

Failed

**HB 26** (Corte) would have prevented those deemed intoxicated from receiving exemplary damages due to a crash.

**HB 253** (Smith, Todd/Goolsby/Callegari/Anchia) and **SB 59** (Zaffarini) would have given authority and set up guidelines for law enforcement agencies to establish a checkpoint on a highway or street to determine whether persons are driving while intoxicated.

**HB 259** (Corte) would have authorized paramedics and emergency medical technicians to draw a blood specimen from a vehicle operator to test for alcohol concentration or other intoxicating substances.

**HB 540** (Martinez Fischer) would have created a hotline to report suspected incidents of impaired driving or dangerous driving.

**HB 634** (Eiland) would have eliminated the Intoxicants Clause from the Texas Insurance Code, preventing insurers from not covering patients deemed intoxicated.

**HB 934** (Harper-Brown) and **SB 437** (Ellis) would have mandated the use of an ignition interlock device on conviction of certain intoxication offenses.

**HB 1644** (Dutton) would have required that an applicant for an original driver's license complete a course on the laws relating to driving while intoxicated.

**HB 1799** (Martinez Fischer) would have created the office of an executive commissioner for the prevention of driving while intoxicated.

**HB 2851** (Davis, John) would have required that certain persons whose driver's licenses are suspended or revoked on conviction of an offense for driving while intoxicated complete a drug or alcohol dependence evaluation and educational program.
SB 233 (Zaffirini) would have allowed law enforcement agencies to establish a checkpoint to determine whether persons are boating while intoxicated.

SB 1061 (Williams) would have allowed for those who refuse to submit a breath specimen to have their vehicle equipped with an ignition interlock device.

**Freight Safety**

**Passed**

SB 331 (Carona) increases the maximum length for saddlemount commercial vehicle transporter combinations from 75 to 97 feet.

SB 332 (Carona) authorizes the state to prohibit a motor carrier from operating in intrastate commerce if the U.S. Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has prohibited the carrier from operating in interstate commerce because it is deemed unfit or unsafe.

SB 387 (Carona) redefines “loose material” in Transportation Code Chapter 725 by adding the term “refuse,” which is defined as “trash, rubbish, garbage, or any other discarded material.” It also deletes existing statutory language that exempts a vehicle operated at a speed less than 30 miles an hour from application of this chapter.

SB 545 (Carona), HB 1638 (Taylor) & HB 2077 (Krusee) added more than 40 municipal police departments to those police agencies eligible to have DPS train their peace officers to become certified to enforce commercial motor vehicle safety standards.

**Failed**

HB 2899 (Harper-Brown) would have required a compliance review and safety audit of a motor carrier that failed federal safety standards.

HB 2900 (Harper-Brown) would have imposed a fine for those operating of a commercial motor vehicle without a license.

HB 2901 (Harper-Brown) would have suspended a motor carrier’s registration if it failed to conduct alcohol and drug testing of employees that hold commercial drivers licenses.

SB 547 (Carona) and HB 1272 (Jackson, Jim) would have allowed for the revocation of a motor carrier’s registration if the carrier fails to conduct any required drug or alcohol testing on an employee who holds a commercial driver's license.
**Bicycle, Pedestrian, Child Safety**

**Passed**

**HB 323** requires all new buses purchased by a school district on or after September 1, 2010 to be equipped with lap/shoulder seatbelts. All buses contracted for use by a school district on or after September 1, 2011 must be equipped with lap/shoulder seatbelts. (The bill’s provisions will not take effect unless the legislature appropriates the necessary funds to school districts to cover the expenses of such changes.)

**HB 1045** (Truitt) designated April as Child Safety Month

**HB 1355** (Gattis/Anchia/Naishtat/Delisi/Rose) a.k.a. Lillian’s Law - requires all dog owners to properly secure their dogs on their property. The law provides that a dog owner can be held criminally responsible if the dog causes serious bodily injury or death at a location other than the owner’s property in an unprovoked attack during which the owner by criminal negligence failed to secure the dog. It exempts many dog professionals (including peace officers) who deal with dogs on a regular basis from the bill.

**Failed**

**HB 2111** (Patrick) would have required flashing lights to be posted in school crossing zones.

**SB 60** (Zaffarini) and **HB 118** (Brown, Fred) would have raised the requirement for children in age-appropriate child restraints to eight years of age unless measuring 4’-9”.

**SB 248** (Ellis) and **HB 1790** (Harper-Brown) would have required a vehicle passing a bicyclist on a street or highway with two or more marked lanes to vacate the lane the bicyclist is using, or pass at a safe distance if alternate lanes are not available (at least three feet for passenger vehicles and light trucks or six feet for commercial vehicles).
Regional Safety Activities

There are a variety of traffic-safety related activities occurring in the region, including those initiatives stemming from the efforts of the Regional Safety Council, its subcommittees, and H-GAC staff. The following is a comprehensive listing of previous and current traffic-safety related activities in the Houston-Galveston area.

Aggressive Driving

Regionally, there is a growing recognition that aggressive driving as a major problem. Over 80% of all fatal crashes from 2004 to 2006 involved speeding and/or other aggressive driving behavior. Several educational and enforcement efforts have been initiated throughout the region to help combat aggressive driving. In addition to Houston Police Department’s Crash Reduction Fatality Campaign, three other major initiatives have been implemented in the region to reduce aggressive driving and improve driver safety. Two of these efforts are focused on young drivers and the other on the driving public in general. Each initiative is relatively new to the area, and time will tell whether they will have a significant impact on driver behavior and traffic safety in the region.

HPD Fatality Crash Reduction Campaign

In January 2008, the Houston Police Department (HPD) spearheaded the Fatality Crash Reduction Campaign. The campaign is a regional, multi-agency initiative consisting of HPD, TxDOT, regional law enforcement agencies, victims’ advocate groups, regional district attorneys, the media and H-GAC, to combine resources in combating aggressive and drunk driving. A city-wide media campaign kicked off on March 28, 2008 in the Beth Yeshurun Cemetery at the gravesite of a drunk-driving victim.

The campaign will roll out new programs every month designed to gain and sustain media interest in our community’s fatality crash reduction efforts. Law enforcement agencies throughout the region along with corresponding District Attorney’s offices will target traffic crimes to reduce the number of fatality crashes in the region. The media will be provided access to enforcement initiatives via ride-alongs and dash-cam video releases of dangerous drivers whose cases have been adjudicated. In addition, a series of billboards and PSAs are being developed to educate the public about the dangers of drunk and aggressive driving.

Some examples of enforcement initiatives being rolled out include:

- **Aggressive Driver Program** – Unmarked HPD fleet vehicles that have been equipped with radar, video, and police radios will patrol freeways and major thoroughfares in search of aggressive drivers. The unmarked units will serve as spotters to identify and establish probable cause for aggressive drivers who engage in multiple moving violations and excessive speeding. Information will be radioed from these spotters to marked interceptor units, which will apprehend identified violators.
• **No Refusal Nights** – This is a joint initiative between the local District Attorney, participating law enforcement, and MADD in which suspects arrested for driving under the influence who refuse to provide a sample of their breath or blood for analysis will be served with a search warrant, filed by an on-sight assistant district attorney and signed by an on-call judge. A nurse, paid for by MADD, will be on-sight to perform the blood draw authorized by the search warrant.

• **BAT Mobile Deployment** – Six mobile DWI processing units will be brought on-line for rapid evaluation and processing of motorists suspected of DWI. Experts in drug-use and DWI recognition will be teamed with patrol units who will transport suspects to mobile Blood-Alcohol Testing units (BAT Mobiles) and complete the prisoner processing paperwork and charges.

• **Vehicle Seizure** – In a joint effort between HPD and the Harris County District Attorney, the Houston Police Department will implement a new process which will allow for the seizure of vehicles owned and driven by habitual DWI offenders, racers, and those who attempt to evade arrest using a motor vehicle.

Additional initiatives will be announced and promoted throughout the balance of the year, including but not limited to STEP overtime programs, expansion of Truck Enforcement, and DWI squads.

** Teens in the Driver Seat  

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading killer of teens in the United States accounting for approximately 6,000 deaths each year. Regionally, one in five serious crashes involves a teen driver. Many of these crashes are due to driver inexperience and distractions such as cellular phone use and text messaging. In response to this growing epidemic, TTI established the Teens in the Driver Seat (TDS) program, a peer-to-peer driving safety initiative to reduce the number of teen injuries and deaths from traffic crashes.

The program uses positive peer relations to encourage teenage drivers to develop safe driving habits because teenagers would be more likely listen to their fellow teenagers than to adults in many instances. With that in mind, TTI began working with high-school students in San Antonio to develop a curriculum for safe driving that the students would promote. Assessments conducted by TTI showed that awareness increased 200 percent, seat belt use increased 11 percent and cell phone use and texting decreased 30 percent at schools that have implemented the program.

The program has been very successful. Since 2001, over 100 TDS programs have started up in high schools statewide. Moreover, students in each school are allowed to develop their own approach to educating their fellow students. This customized approach ensures that the program is promoted in ways that students in each school can relate to, thus strengthening the program’s message. In the Houston-Galveston region, two new programs have been started at Sweeny High School, in Sweeny, TX, and Angleton High School, in Angleton, TX.
Recently, Congressman Ciro D. Rodriguez (TX-23) secured $343,000 in new federal funding to expand the program. According to TTI, some of the additional funding will be used to plan two inaugural safety summits in San Antonio and El Paso.³

**Driver’s Edge**

Driver’s Edge is a non-profit defensive driving organization founded in 2002. The organization focuses solely on providing free advance defensive driving instruction to young drivers through a combination of classroom instruction and behind-the-wheel training taught by professional race car drivers and performance driving instructors. Participants receive in-car instruction that is traditionally not taught in driver’s education, including skid control, evasive lane changing, anti-lock braking skills, panic breaking techniques and more.

Since its inception, over 50,000 young drivers and their parents have participated in the program. During a typical event, there are two daily sessions with between 80 to 100 students each. The program also contacts students at 12 and 24 month intervals to monitor their progress and get feedback.

The inaugural Driver’s Edge National Tour event was held in Houston at Reliant Park on April 19 and 20, 2008. The 2-day event was attended by nearly 600 teens and their parents. H-GAC staff as well as local and state law enforcement agencies also attended the training seminars.

**Red Light Cameras**

In September 2006, the City of Houston began implementing red-light enforcement cameras at select intersections. Working with H-GAC staff, the Houston Police Department identified 50 locations (See Figure 1) to install the first cameras based on a high incidence of red-light running crashes.

The City of Houston’s program, in its first year, appears to have shown success. The cameras have identified over 230,000 violators since the program’s inception. In September 2007, the city installed an additional 20 cameras, and began to issue citations for illegal turns at photo-enforcement intersections in October 2007. The number of citations declined to 17,000 in February 2008 from a high of 27,000 in October 2007. The decline suggests that the program has been effective since drivers now know that they are being watched. Since Houston’s decision to install the cameras, the City of Humble has installed five cameras, the City of Sugar Land installed four cameras, and Montgomery County has installed two cameras with plans to install six more.

The program has been controversial due to the perception that the cameras are a revenue-generating program and invade one’s privacy. Several lawsuits have been brought against the City of Houston challenging the constitutionality of red light cameras. However, all the lawsuits have been dismissed by the courts. Moreover, the State Legislature passed legislation (S.B. 1119) that was enacted on September 1, 2007, which while giving local cities the right to use red light cameras places restrictions on their use and requires cities to prove the cameras help reduce vehicle crashes. The new law also limits the fine for red light camera violations to $75.00, makes

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³ Texas Transportation Institute. “Federal Funding Accelerates Teen Driving Safety”.
<http://tti.tamu.edu/infofor/media/feature.htm>
it easier for cited motorists to appeal citations, forces municipalities to surrender half of all revenue generated by red light cameras to the State Trauma Fund, and limits how communities can spend the money they keep.

Figure 1: Regional Red Light Camera Locations
Driving While Intoxicated/Under the Influence

Driving under the influence is a crime that has plagued this region and is completely preventable. In 2005, Harris County received the dubious honor of leading the country in per capita alcohol-related deaths in counties with populations of 1 million or more persons. In 2006, 319 people lost their lives in crashes stemming from driving under the influence, representing over 56 percent of all the region’s motor vehicle fatalities. Because of the seriousness and the pervasiveness of the DWI/DUI problem, many resources have been put into stopping it.

MADD Take the Wheel Campaign

In response to Harris County’s alcohol-related crash fatalities, Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) launched the “Take the Wheel” initiative in November 2006. The initiative, the first of its kind for MADD, involved the organization focusing all of its resources and enlisting the greater community’s resources in combating drunk driving. The multi-phase initiative included town hall meetings, a drunk-driving summit, and the following activities:

- Informing citizens about the extent of drunk driving and what to do to stop it.
- Working with law enforcement agencies to step up enforcement of the state’s driving while intoxicated laws.
- Asking lawmakers to sponsor laws that strengthen enforcement and support the fight to eliminate drunk driving, such as sobriety checkpoints.
- Putting volunteers in courtrooms to help judges and prosecutors identify ways to impose strict and swift sentences for DWI offenders.
- Helping victims of drunk driving through their grief and legal battles.
- Implementing programs in schools to teach students about the effects of alcohol on the developing brain and ways to make healthy decisions involving alcohol.
- Implementing programs in colleges to prevent underage drinking and to prevent drunk driving and binge drinking.
- Calling on citizens to get involved and help eliminate drunk driving.

Four town hall meetings were held throughout Harris County during March and April 2007. These meetings, which were open to the public, included presentations by a panel of experts representing different segments of the community, including H-GAC, the Houston City Council, Houston Police Department, the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission, Harris County Sheriff’s Department, Houston ISD, the Harris County District Attorney’s Office, and several other entities working with MADD to reduce drunk driving. In addition, MADD, TxDOT, and other organizations had booths with materials available for attendees about drunk driving.

MADD also held a Take the Wheel Drunk Driving Summit in August 2007, providing a forum for city, county, and law enforcement representatives to address the issue of eliminating drunk driving in the Houston area. Mayor Bill White announced a new anti-drunk driving initiative, including stepped-up law enforcement and an information campaign, designed to eradicate drunk driving and underage drinking in Harris County. In addition, Houston Police Chief Harold Hurtt promoted the unification of law enforcement agencies as a vital part to reducing drunk-driving
fatalities. Several law enforcement agencies participating in the Summit committed to join forces to eliminate drunk driving.

**Harris County High Risk Drinking Epidemiological Workgroup**

In December 2006, the Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services, along with three area coalitions, Bay Area Alliance for Youth & Families, Coalition for Behavioral Health Services-North, and the Southeast Harris Community Coalition created the Harris County High Risk Drinking Epidemiological Workgroup. The purpose of the Workgroup is to develop and implement strategies to reduce underage and high-risk drinking and alcohol-related motor vehicle fatalities. The Texas Department of State Health Services awarded grants to the three coalitions to help carry out this goal.

In June 2007, after recognizing the commonalities of H-GAC’s DWI Subcommittee and the Workgroup’s efforts, the two groups have combined their efforts and now hold joint meetings. This partnership has allowed all entities to maximize resources for data collection and implementation of community-based strategies that address the alcohol-related motor vehicle fatalities and binge-drinking in Harris County.

The Workgroup has yielded invaluable data on the prevalence of high-risk drinking, alcohol-related motor vehicle fatalities, and the intervening variables that precipitate those consequences. It has also identified gaps in the data collection process, namely the lack of data below the county level, and worked on ways to bridge those gaps and obtain data that are needed to strategically plan prevention efforts at a community level. The coalitions that make up this workgroup have also stepped out into the community to try to reduce drunk driving through the following activities:

- **Victim’s Impact Panel Discussion** - In October 2007 provided a forum where mothers from the Houston area who lost their loved ones to alcohol related incidents could share their stories.

- **SIDNE Simulator** – the Bay Area Alliance worked with the Harris County Sheriff’s Office to bring the SIDNE Interactive DUI Simulation to San Jacinto College. SIDNE is a go-cart simulation that allows drivers to experience what it is like to drive under the influence.

- **Brought the national Save-A-Life Tour to San Jacinto College in February 2008** to educate students about the dangers of drinking and driving. Unlike most alcohol education seminars, this program includes an in your face presentation and concludes with a drunk driving simulator so that you can experience the effects of intoxication on the human response.

- **The Bay Area Alliance for Youth & Families partnered with Friendswood PD, Webster PD, Seabrook PD and Harris County Constable Precinct 8** in implementing a DWI Enforcement Project in Southeast Harris County. Funds were provided for four additional DWI patrol shifts per month on peak DWI/alcohol violation days and times. In addition, Webster PD received funding to provide at least two extra alcohol enforcement detail shifts (includes 4 officers working a 4 ½ hour shift) to specifically monitor clubs, bars, restaurants and other establishments to arrest and/or issue citations to those patrons and/or employees who are in violation of alcohol laws.
Southeast Harris Community Coalition's youth component, STARS (Students Taking Action Reaching Solutions) partnered with La Porte High School's TRUTH (Teens Reaching Upward Toward Health) group to host a Town Hall on Underage Drinking in April 2008. This gave the youth a chance to educate adults about the dangers of providing alcohol to underage youth. Experts from TABC and the Emergency Medical Service spoke about the consequences of underage drinking. The personal impact was addressed by a recent La Porte High School graduate and a family who lost their son to drinking and driving.

Healing Field
On December 8, 2007 the Bay Area Council on Drugs and Alcohol (BACODA) hosted a Healing Field in Tom Bass Park in Pearland, Texas. The event was intended to draw awareness to alcohol-related traffic fatalities in Texas. The memorial consisted of 1,677 3 x 5 foot American flags, each representing a life lost to drunk driving in 2006. The Healing Field concept was based off of a temporary memorial for the victims of 9/11 and has evolved into commemorative events for other causes nation-wide. The Colonial Flag Foundation is the non–profit organization that promotes Healing Fields and Fields of Honor by assisting local charities and non–profits hosting these events.

BACODA sponsored the free event in conjunction with TABC, TxDOT, the Department of State Health Services, Sam Houston Area Council-Boy Scouts of America, Texas National Guard and the H-GAC. H–GAC staff played a pivotal role in the event, including the design of the field, surveying, and supervision of flag installation the day before the event. In addition to the family–oriented activities, attendees could purchase the flags on display, with the proceeds going to fund BACODA’s efforts to reduce underage drinking and drunk driving.

It is expected that there will be another Healing Field event in 2008 to commemorate those who lost their lives to drunk driving in 2007. Unfortunately, preliminary reports show that even more flags are going to be required for that event.

Texans Standing Tall Forum
In January 2008, Texans Standing Tall, a statewide organization focused on the reduction of underage alcohol and drug use, held a regional forum focusing on reducing and preventing youth substance abuse and driving under the influence. The Forum, put on with the help of the three area coalitions, served as an opportunity for communities to equip themselves with needed information and tools to effectively collaborate for change at local, regional and state levels. Speakers included Assistant Chief Vicki King of the Houston Police Department, speaking on the regional Fatality Crash Reduction Campaign, and Representative Craig Eiland of Galveston, speaking about the proposed repeal of the Intoxicants Clause in the Insurance Code. 100 attendees showed up to discuss approaches to combat the problem, including a discussion of regional law enforcement to develop a DWI Task Force.

No Refusal Weekend
Area law enforcement has begun conducting No-Refusal Weekends in an attempt to reduce drunk driving. Anyone arrested under suspicion of DWI would be required to provide a blood sample
upon being brought to the central booking facility. If a suspect refuses to provide a sample, a
search warrant would be drawn up and faxed to a judge who has agreed to stay up all night, if
necessary, to process the warrant. Upon return of the warrant from the judge, a nurse would take
the blood draw. These No Refusal Weekends are expected to be held on holiday weekends when
drunk driving tends to be more prevalent. However, they can be held at any time without
warning.

Montgomery County held its first No Refusal Weekend on New Year’s Day 2007. Since then, Fort
Bend, Galveston, Harris, Liberty, and Waller Counties have conducted their own programs.
Recently, the Houston Police Department received funding for six mobile Blood Alcohol Testing
centers (a.k.a BAT Mobiles), that permit on the spot test, thus reducing suspect processing time
during which their BAC can decrease.

*DWI Initiative*

The *DWI Initiative has been developed by the DWI/DUI subcommittee of the RSC as an
additional means of combating drunk driving in the region. The initiative will be a permanent
effort to enhance the ability of law enforcement agencies to decrease injuries and deaths due to
intoxicated driving.

The program would allow any motorist to dial *DWI (star 394) from their cellular phone when
they believe they have sighted an impaired driver. Incident information and the caller’s cellular
phone number would be recorded and passed on to a specially assigned law enforcement officer
equipped with a cellular phone via the local jurisdiction’s dispatch center. The officer would be
able to follow up with the motorist who made the report to verify the current location of the
impaired driver and determine the feasibility of apprehending the suspect.

The subcommittee and H-GAC staff are currently working to address the three major components
needed to successfully implement the initiative. These components include ensuring that *DWI is
properly programmed into all regional cellular telephone networks; developing uniform
procedures amongst regional law enforcement dispatch centers for processing *DWI calls; and,
securing cellular telephones and service for those regional law enforcement agencies that commit
to participate in the program.

Once the program is launched, H-GAC staff will work with participating agencies to track the
number of arrests due to *DWI calls, document any operational issues that arise, and work to
promote and expand the program. If the program proves successful, promotion of the program to
the public and additional law enforcement agencies will help to increase the effectiveness of DWI
enforcement throughout the region.

**DWI Task Force**

Another initiative from the DWI/DUI Subcommittee is a regional DWI Task Force. This effort is
being spearheaded by the HPD Traffic Enforcement Division and will involve agencies in Harris,
Galveston, and possibly Brazoria counties. The Task Force is an extension of the HPD Fatality
Crash Reduction Campaign (See page 12) and will be a collaborative effort between law
enforcement, respective district attorneys’ offices, area community service organizations, and the
media.
The Task Force will provide heightened enforcement in regional drunk driving “hot spots” at certain times by combining the resources of several law enforcement agencies. The Task Force is expected to begin operations sometime in summer 2008.

**Criminal Justice Community Plans**

In order to receive funding from the Criminal Justice Division of the Texas Governor’s Office, counties are required to submit an update criminal justice community plan to the State. H-GAC functions as the regional intermediary in this process by conducting workshops to help county officials create and/or update their community plans, and providing guidance throughout the application process.

H-GAC staff visited with criminal justice community planning committees throughout the region to encourage them to include provisions for DWI enforcement in their community plans for FY2009. The inclusion of such provisions would allow the county to possibly receive additional funding for drunken driving enforcement and any related equipment needs. As of today, Chambers, Fort Bend, Galveston, Montgomery, and Waller Counties have included intoxicated driving provisions in their community plans. Staff will continue to work with officials in these counties to encourage them to submit applications for funding for DWI-related activities.

**Freight Safety**

With nearly 200 million tons of cargo moving through the Port of Houston in 2006 and 400 petrochemical manufacturing establishments in the region, freight transportation is not just a vital component of our region’s economic health but of the nation as a whole. It is anticipated that the next two decades will see a robust growth in goods movement, especially in terms of container movement. This makes freight safety on our roads and rails all the more critical. The region has taken it upon itself not only to ensure that freight transportation is safe, but that driving public is safe around the freight being transported.

**Commercial Vehicle Enforcement**

A critical component of commercial vehicle safety is the enforcement of commercial vehicle laws and regulations for both drivers and fleet owners. With the volume of truck traffic in the Houston-Galveston region and the significant impact of CMV crashes on traffic, enforcement becomes essential to ensuring a safe and smooth commute. Several law enforcement entities in the region do have dedicated commercial vehicle enforcement units. Some enforcement activity is funded through TxDOT STEP grants, which the Houston Police Department was the first in the state to utilize for commercial vehicle enforcement. The following entities conduct commercial vehicle enforcement in the region:

- *Texas Department of Public Safety* – The Texas Department of Public Safety (TxDPS) is the state-designated entity responsible for the enforcement of commercial vehicle laws. This

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includes the enforcement of motor carrier safety regulations, weight and size laws, hazardous materials regulations, licensing, and vehicle registration laws. TxDPS currently has 63 law enforcement officers and five civilian inspectors in the region designated for commercial vehicle enforcement.

- **Harris County Sheriff’s Department** - The unit, consisting of 10 deputies, conducts roadside inspections and weight enforcement. The unit also conducts safety seminars for local motor carriers. The unit is responsible for conducting "Post Crash" inspections of commercial motor vehicles to determine pre-crash conditions that may have been a contributing factor to the accident. The unit is also actively involved in the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance (CVSA). CVSA is an international alliance of personnel from all facets of the trucking industry including truck and component manufacturers, motor carriers and enforcement personnel from nearly every level of government. The main purpose of the CVSA is to promote commercial vehicle safety through education and uniform application of commercial vehicle safety regulations and inspection procedures.

- **City of Houston** – Houston Police Department’s Truck Enforcement Unit conducts commercial truck and motorcoach safety inspections within the City of Houston. The unit consists of 21 full-time and 4 part-time officers and three full-time sergeants with plans to add additional staff by year’s end. Officers conduct a 57-item commercial vehicle safety inspection. If a serious federal regulatory violation is detected, then an out-of-service order is issued to the driver. Upon repairs of the out-of-service item(s), the commercial vehicle is allowed to continue on its way. In addition to daily safety inspections performed throughout the city of Houston, the Truck Enforcement Unit conducts a minimum of two-area truck safety inspection operations each month. Commercial truck safety operations are conducted in different quadrants of the city and officers will inspect haz-mat, cargo tank, flatbed, or overweight trucks depending on the safety operation. On occasion specialized units from within the department such as the Auto Theft Division Port Squad, Criminal Intelligence Division, Major Offenders Division Environmental Squad and Narcotics Division will participate in these truck safety operations.

- **City of Pasadena** - The City of Pasadena’s Department of Transportation / License & Weight Unit consists of two full-time officers and four part-time officers. All officers assigned to the unit are certified DOT Inspectors. The four part-time officers work this assignment in conjunction with their regularly assigned patrol duties. The Department has also implemented a Fleet Safety Program, which focuses on information sharing, fleet safety education and obtaining voluntary compliance with federal and state safety regulations. Officers work with local industries to train their employees on commercial vehicle safety and federal regulations.

**Truck Lane Restrictions**

As an approach to reducing crashes with 18-wheelers, TxDOT has implemented truck lane restrictions on several freeways in the region. This approach, implemented on certain sections of IH-10, IH-45 North, US 290, and SH 225 with at least six lanes, restricts commercial truck traffic from using the left lane. The objective of the restriction is to provide some separation of truck traffic from passenger vehicle traffic. The Texas Transportation Institute conducted a study to
evaluate the impacts of this restriction and found that crashes were reduced by 68% and compliance with the restriction was over 95% without impact to freeway operations.

“NO ZONE” Campaign

The “No Zone” Campaign is part of a public education effort by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration to educate motorists about how to safely share the road with trucks and buses. The Campaign was created in 1994 as a result of the enactment of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act in 1991.

The goal of the campaign is to teach drivers about the “No Zones” or blind spots around commercial vehicles in which passenger cars can “disappear”, thereby increasing the likelihood of crashes and/or fatalities. Educating the driving public about these “No Zones” is one way of reducing accidents, injuries and deaths involving commercial vehicles.

One aspect of the “No Zone” Campaign is the placement of “No Zone” decals on tractor-trailers and buses. These 2 by 4-foot decals illustrate where the blind spots of commercial vehicles are located and warn other drivers not to linger in these areas. H-GAG staff have modified and enhanced the original “No Zone” decals (See Figure 2) to more effectively convey the message that driving in the blind spots of commercial vehicles is dangerous and should be avoided.

H-GAC staff is currently in the process of soliciting local motor carriers to partner with in order to implement a “No Zone” Decal Campaign in our area. Partnering organizations would affix these decals on their trailers and/or buses as part of a general public awareness campaign. Decals would be provided free of charge. However, decal installation costs will be the sole responsibility of each participating entity.

Railroad Crossing Cameras

The Houston-Galveston Area is a major hub for Intermodal freight, much of which is moved into and out the region by rail. With more than 1,800 railroad-highway grade crossings throughout the region, there are a high number of railroad-highway grade crossing incidents. While the region has 12% of the railroad-highway crossings in the state, it accounts for nearly 20% of all railroad-highway grade crossings incidents in 2006. Moreover, trains that block crossings for extended periods increase traffic congestion impede the flow of people and goods, and increase air pollution as blocked vehicles sit idling.

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5 Texas Transportation Institute. “Are truck lane restrictions the answer?” Texas Transportation Researcher 38.1 (2002)
HPD and the City of Houston Public Works Department have deployed 19 railroad crossing cameras (See Figure 3) to monitor certain at-grade crossings where parked trains have been a problem. These cameras, which do not record or report traffic violations, help City officials monitor crossings were parked trains have caused excessive traffic delays and create potential hazards for pedestrians, who may attempt to climb over trains parked to extended periods. The City plans to deploy more cameras at additional crossings as resources permit.

The Regional Safety Council has reviewed a potential solution for railroad crossing violations namely the deployment of railroad crossing enforcement cameras. These devices, which operate similar to red light cameras, can record a vehicle that drives through a crossing when its signals and/or devices have been activated by approaching trains. Violations recorded by the cameras would be verified and processed, and the motorists would be issued citations accordingly.

Grand Prairie, Texas became the first city in the state to install a railroad crossing enforcement camera in June 2007. The city which has a large number of crossings and busy rail lines has been plagued by an increasing number of railroad-highway crossing injuries and deaths. The camera was installed to enhance other enforcement efforts the city and Union Pacific officials have previously conducted. Since railroad crossing cameras are not subject to the legislative price cap imposed by S.B. 1119, the city levies a $150.00 fine for each violation. About two-thirds of the revenue generated is retained by Grand Prairie. The City says the revenue will be used to make safety improvements at railroad crossing throughout the city.

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**Operation Lifesaver**

Operation Lifesaver is a non-profit, international, public education program first established in 1972 to end collisions, deaths and injuries at highway-rail grade crossings and on railroad rights-of-way. The organization, supported by both the federal government and the railroad industry, uses volunteer certified Presenters to give free age and group appropriate presentations to schools, school transportation personnel, professional drivers, law enforcement and emergency response personnel, civic clubs, and church groups about highway-rail grade crossing safety. In addition, presentations are supported by visual materials, age-appropriate videos, and brochures.

The mission of Operation Lifesaver is to promote the 3 Es of safety:

1. **Education:** increasing public awareness about the dangers around the rails. The program seeks to educate both drivers and pedestrians to make safe decisions at crossings and around railroad tracks.

2. **Engineering:** promoting engineering for keeping crossings as safe as possible and making improvements where needed, as well as continued engineering research and innovation to improve the safety of railroad crossings.

3. **Enforcement:** promoting active enforcement of traffic laws relating to crossing signs and signals and private property laws related to trespassing. Operation Livesaver also promotes Grade Crossing Collision Investigation, Officer on the Train, and classes for First Responders.

Regionally, Operation Lifesaver works with the Houston Police Department to promote highway-rail grade crossing safety.

**Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Child Safety**

Bicycle and pedestrian and child safety issues will become increasingly important as population densities in Harris County increase, and as people in surrounding counties seek alternative means of transportation due to raising fuel costs. Although subject area recommendations have yet to formalized, the Bicycle, Pedestrian and Child Safety (BPC) Subcommittee is working with staff to meaningful proposals to address regional safety issues related to cyclist, pedestrians, and children.

Several major non-motorized transportation safety initiatives have been launched in the region or are under development by various state, regional, and local entities. Moreover, recent investigations by staff have revealed several issues of concern that deserve further examine in the future.

**Safe Routes to School**

The Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program is a provision of SAFETEA-LU legislation that was enacted in 2003. The program provides funding for infrastructure projects and educational activities to enable and encourage primary and middle school age children (grades K-8) to walk or bike to school. Eligible organizations participate in a competitive funding process which is administrated by TxDOT. Approved projects receive 100% funding; however, recipients must comply with all federal and state funding requirements.
Table 2 lists some of the projects and activities that can be funding under the SRTS program. Proposed infrastructure projects must be within a 2-mile radius of the recipient school and be located on public property or private land with legal access easement agreements.

### Table 2: SRTS Eligible Program Funding Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infrastructure</th>
<th>Non-Infrastructure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Sidewalk improvements</td>
<td>• Creation of a Safe Routes to School Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pedestrian and bicycle crossing improvements</td>
<td>• Conducting a bicycle or pedestrian audit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• On-street bicycle facilities</td>
<td>• Conducting a bicycle rodeo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Off-street bicycle and pedestrian facilities</td>
<td>• Developing a crossing guard program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Traffic diversion improvements</td>
<td>• Implementing a public awareness program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Traffic calming and speed reduction improvements on local roads</td>
<td>• Teaching traffic safety to students and parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Secure bicycle parking facilities</td>
<td>• Developing a walking school bus and/or bike train program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SRTS funding was authorized for five years (FY 2005-2009). In 2009, the US Congress will consider the reauthorization of SRTS. If Congress does not renew funding the SRTS program will cease unless the State of Texas decides to continue funding the program on its own.

Within our region, several schools have received SRTS funding for a variety of projects. Previous award recipients, project descriptions and award amounts are listed in Table 3. From 2005 through 2008, a total of six Houston Independent School District elementary schools received five awards (two schools shared an award) totaling over $2.4 million. H-GAC staff assisted HISD in developing its grant applications and will work to increase the number of SRTS applicants in our region for future funding opportunities.

### Table 3: Regional SRTS Award Recipients 2005-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Award Recipients</th>
<th>Project Description</th>
<th>Award Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carrillo Elementary</td>
<td>Sidewalks, Crosswalks, Signs, Traffic Calming and Bike Racks</td>
<td>$265,969.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>960 South Wayside</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houston, TX 77023</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnet Elementary</td>
<td>Sidewalks, Crosswalks, Signs and Bike Racks</td>
<td>$574,879.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5403 Canal Houston, TX 77011</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin Elementary</td>
<td>Sidewalks, Crosswalks, Signs and Bike Racks</td>
<td>$605,740.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7101 Canal Houston, TX 77011</td>
<td>(SHARED GRANT)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tijerina Elementary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6501 Sherman Houston, TX 77011</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeZavala Elementary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7521 Avenue H Houston, TX 77012</td>
<td>Sidewalks, Crosswalks, Signs and Bike Racks</td>
<td>$417,757.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briscoe Elementary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>321 Forest Hill Houston, TX 77011</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region Total:</td>
<td></td>
<td>$2,429,024.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
METRO Light Rail School Safety Program
In the summer and fall of 2007, H-GAC Staff worked with METRO, Design2Train consultants and other community stakeholders on the Community School Safety Education Program (CSSEP). CSSEP worked in conjunction with METRO Solutions to provide educational materials to public and private primary schools within one-half mile of proposed light rail corridors.

CSSEP stakeholders’ roles and responsibilities included providing safety-related information to enrich the program offerings, review and provide feedback on lesson plans, and inform the group of situations or circumstances in the community which could be addressed with educational materials. In addition to these responsibilities, H-GAC Staff also provided maps of the subject areas for reference and spatial analysis.

In October 2007 METRO cancelled the CSSEP program.

City of Houston Bicycle Safety Campaign
In February 2007, the City of Houston, in conjunction with AAA-Texas and REI Sporting Goods, kicked off the “Watch for Cyclists!” Campaign to promote and educate the public about sharing the road with bicyclists. The campaign centers around a list of tips for sharing the road with bicyclists (See Table 4).

As part of this campaign, the City and AAA-Texas developed a PSA for radio broadcast on these tips. AAA also shared tips with its members, sponsored bike reflectors, and promoted the campaign with the subscribers of its Texas Journey magazine in the May/June 2007 edition. REI stores sold “Watch for Cyclists!” bumper stickers, which raised funds for further sponsorship of bike education and awareness efforts.

Table 4: COH Share the Road Tips

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Watch for Cyclists before driving out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Watch for Cyclists using sidewalks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Watch for Cyclists especially at night.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Watch for Cyclists sharing the road.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Watch for cyclists at intersections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Watch for cyclists before turning right.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Watch for cyclists when passing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Watch for cyclists before turning left.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Watch for cyclists and slow down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Watch for Cyclists before opening your door.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bike Safety Poster
The BPC Subcommittee and H-GAC staff worked with the Texas Bicycle Coalition out of Austin to develop a bicycle safety poster which can be distributed to area schools and recreation centers. The poster (See Figure 4) outlines the six steps children should follow when riding their bicycles. The subcommittee is indebted to Denise Luckey of the Texas Bicycle Coalition for her work on the poster.

The Subcommittee and H-GAC staff is currently working on ways to have the posters distributed region-wide. Each school district has its set of protocols on distribution of materials, which makes the process somewhat complicated. The Subcommittee is working with TxDOT to include the posters with other bicycle safety materials that it provides to schools, organizations, and the general public.

Pedestrian Crash Assessment on Freeways
Recently, H-GAC staff was asked to investigate the characteristics and frequency of pedestrian fatalities on or near highways in Harris County. This investigation was prompted by a request from the media for information after an inexplicable rash of pedestrian crashes occurring on area freeways.

According to data from the NHTSA Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) Encyclopedia from 2005 to 2006, there were 62 incidents in which pedestrians were killed on the main lanes, services roads or at intersection of major highways in Harris County. Staff examined data from 2005 and 2006 because geographic coordinate data is only available for these years.

While the per capita pedestrian fatality rate for Harris County was generally on par with the region’s average for 2005 & 2006 (1.9 per 100,000 vs. 1.8 per 100,000, respectively for the two year period), the investigation found that in 2006 nearly half (43.9%) of all pedestrian fatalities occurred on or near freeways, and that these incidents represented one-fifth of all traffic-related fatalities in Harris County. The findings also showed that nearly half (42%) of all incidents occurred on two highways, the North (IH-45 N) and East (IH-10 E) Freeways. Three quarters of all victims were males, two-thirds were between 26 to 64 years of age, nearly half (47%) of the pedestrian victims had some level of alcohol in their systems at the time of the incident, and most incidents (81%) occurred in the evenings or at night (6 pm to 6 am). The Houston Chronicle ran a story on the problem in March 2008, which included interviews with H-GAC staff. Table XX lists the frequency of pedestrian-freeway incidents on highways in Harris County.
Table 5: Harris County Pedestrian-Freeway Fatalities 2005-2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highway Name</th>
<th>Fatalities</th>
<th>Pct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North Freeway (IH-45 N)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Freeway (IH-10 E)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loop 610</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katy Freeway (IH-10 W)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwest Freeway (US 59 S)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gulf Freeway (IH-45 S)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwest Freeway (US 290)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomball Pkwy (SH 249)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Freeway (SH 288)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SH 146</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastex Freeway (US 59 N)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam Houston Tollway</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>62</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Staff hopes to conduct a more thorough region-wide investigation of these incidents to see if any obvious or subtle patterns emerge once TxDOT CRIS data becomes available.

**Child Safety Seat Poster**

The subcommittee and H-GAC staff has also developed a child safety seat poster in conjunction with the AAA Child Safety Seat Campaign. This poster (See Figure 5) summarizes national child fatality information, state legal requirements and potential penalties associated with failing to properly restrain children in safety seats.

The subcommittee and Staff are working on distribution methods for the posters. Potential locations include day care centers, infant/child retail stores, schools, government buildings, grocers, etc.

**Safety Information Systems**

Data plays a critical role in addressing the transportation safety problems. Lack of information complicates resource allocation and makes it difficult to determine whether safety improvements have had any impact. The release of the updated Crash Record Information System is a highly anticipated event that will make it far easier to conduct these types of analyses. However, there are other data-related issues that need to be addressed in the interim.
CRIS Database
The Crash Record Information System (CRIS) is a collaborative effort TxDPS and TxDOT to create a master database of all crash records that have occurred throughout the state. The system will allow for efficient processing of crash reports and provide readily available access to crash reporting data. The system will provide a technological advancement to the data-limited mainframe system. It will allow for improved ability to conduct crash data analysis, and it will improve reporting capabilities, enhance safety and be a critical tool in decision-making for law enforcement and transportation professionals.8

Currently, CRIS is functioning but is only available for TxDOT use until data validation is complete. According to the latest estimates, the system is scheduled to roll out in late summer of 2008.

Law Enforcement Data Collection Survey
From December 2007 to February 2008, H-GAC and TTI conducted a survey of area law enforcement to determine their crash data collection and analysis methods. A survey of 32 questions was developed by TTI, in consultation with H-GAC. The survey was made available online and distributed via regular mail in some cases to 200 law enforcement agencies in 13 counties. The survey response rate was 36%, with approximately 72 organizations responding.

Table 6 lists some preliminary results from the survey. These survey results are based on self-reported responses have not been audited or verified. These results should not be considered indicative of the practices of every law enforcement agency in the region. Additional verification and analysis of survey results will be required before they can be considered conclusive.

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### Table 6: Select Regional Law Enforcement Crash Data Collection Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q: Uses standard ST3/CBR3 form</th>
<th>Q: Use Paper or electronic forms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consistency of data collection across agencies</strong></td>
<td><strong>Method and efficiency of crash data collection</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer</strong></td>
<td><strong>Percent</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>92.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q: Use Mobile Data Terminals or Laptops</th>
<th>Q: Use GPS receivers to record crash locations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Existence of infrastructure needed to electronically record crash data</strong></td>
<td><strong>Utilization of equipment to improve crash location recording consistency</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer</strong></td>
<td><strong>Percent</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>60.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>39.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q: How is crash data utilized?</th>
<th>Q: Methods of Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extent of crash data utilization</strong></td>
<td><strong>Extent of local agency crash data analysis</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer</strong></td>
<td><strong>Percent</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crash Analysis</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hot Spot Issues</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Allocation</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Sharing</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Utilization</td>
<td>43.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q: Periodically heightened traffic enforcement</th>
<th>Q: Know definition of “CRIS”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency/capacity for increased traffic enforcement</strong></td>
<td><strong>Know definition and purpose of Crash Record Information System</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer</strong></td>
<td><strong>Percent</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>49.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>50.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q: DPS/TxDOT data submission method</th>
<th>Q: Planning future technology Improvements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Crash data submission method</strong></td>
<td><strong>Future technology improvements</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer</strong></td>
<td><strong>Percent</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard Copy</td>
<td>71.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web Entry</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic Data File</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Multiple answers possible; results do not add up to 100%  
** Trend Analysis: analyzing data for patterns; Crash Frequency: Number of crashes at a location or area; Normalization: Analysis based on the magnitude of a measure (i.e.-Traffic Volume, Vehicle Miles, Population)
FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The 2007 State of Safety in the Region report was in essence a “first step” towards identifying and resolving the region’s traffic safety issues. These issues have plagued the region for years and unfortunately, will continue to be problematic for years to come. However, the efforts of the Regional Safety Council, regional law enforcement and governmental agencies, and the area’s community service organizations can help to minimize impacts of these issues in our region.

The initiatives identified in this report are the “seeds” of some of the solutions needed to address problems with aggressive and intoxicated driving, freight safety, and pedestrian, bicycle, and child safety. Many of these initiatives have the potential to become reoccurring events around which the region can rally to call attention to traffic safety issues. Events like the Healing Field could become major annual projects used to showcase regional efforts to combat unsafe driving behavior, and provide opportunities to educate the sponsors of other programs as well as the general public about various aspects of traffic safety. Likewise, the Texans Standing Tall Forum and regional and statewide safety conferences can become permanent vehicles in which research and best practices are shared and regional traffic safety policies are formulated.

Ultimately, a lot will depend on the actions of the State Legislature. While many worthwhile bills have been enacted during past legislative sessions, many pieces of legislation that would greatly enhance traffic safety have failed to win approval, or even consideration. The Council and its members have and should continue to demonstrate the need for appropriate legislation to address regional and statewide traffic safety concerns.

A major stumbling block to the identification of traffic safety issues and the formulation of sound policies is the lack of quality crash data. The lack of recent crash data and the inherent inefficiencies in the collection, processing and storage of crash records substantially hinders the efforts of those charged with addressing traffic safety issues. Lack of data impedes the identification of problem areas, makes it difficult to determine the magnitude of problems, and challenges the ability to effectively measure the impact of safety initiatives and infrastructure improvements.

In addition to the accessibility of crash data, there is also the question of its quality. Information reporting requirements and record keeping practices vary amongst institutions which complicate the process of sharing data. These procedural issues will have to be resolved in order to create a regional crash record database that contains accurate information for safety analysis and policy development.

The ongoing fiscal crisis that has affected all level of government, and even the private and non-profit sectors, will present a greater challenge to the region’s efforts to address safety concerns. With the pending reauthorization of federal transportation legislation, and future appropriations plans from the state legislature, funding levels for all types of transportation-related activities including new road construction as well as safety issues is at best uncertain. This situation makes safety advocacy all the more important because, our ability to safely navigate our roads and highways is critical to our well-being and to the well-being of our economy and society.

Finally, as the Regional Safety Council continues its work, it may be necessary to consider broadening the focus of the Council and restructuring some its subcommittees. Transportation
safety is not a static subject. New issues arise constantly due to changes in demographics, the environment, and technology. In order to provide the best possible policy guidance to the TPC and all the organizations affiliated with the Regional Safety Council, critical self-review and reconfiguration are needed on a constant basis.