



**Statement by Troy Costales  
Governors Highway Safety Association  
for the NTSB Symposium on Driver Education and Training  
October 28-29, 2003  
Washington DC**

My name is Troy Costales, Administrator of the Transportation Safety Division of the Oregon Department of Transportation. In this position, I am also the Oregon Governor's Highway Safety Representative. I am here on behalf of the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA), the nonprofit association that represents State Highway Safety Offices (SHSO). Its members are appointed by their governors to administer federal highway safety grant funds and to implement state highway safety programs.

Although I represent one of two SHSO's that is also directly responsible for a state's driver education program, all state highway safety agencies are concerned about young drivers and most have educational and other programs addressing those drivers.

**Background**

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of fatalities for persons aged 15-20 years. In 2002, more than 8,000 were involved in fatal crashes (a twelve percent increase from the 1992 level), nearly 4,000 were killed and an estimated 324,000 were injured. 6.6 percent of licensed drivers were under 21, yet 14.6 percent of all fatal crashes<sup>1</sup> involved drivers between the ages of 15-20. Clearly, young drivers are over-represented in fatal crashes, and every effort must be made to reduce the number of deaths and injuries involving these drivers.

The public perception is that impaired driving is the major cause of young driver motor vehicle crashes. However, extensive research by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) has shown that sixteen year-olds are involved in fatal and serious injury crashes primarily because they are inexperienced, less skilled, and often use poor judgment when driving. Their attitudes toward driving often lead them to be high risk takers.

The theory is that if young drivers received improved driver education and were better trained, they would be safer drivers and would experience fewer fatal and injury crashes. However, the state of driver education has changed dramatically over the last thirty years. Driver education is no longer in the sole purview of public schools primarily because of state budget reductions. According to a recent survey by USA Today, 27 states offer financial assistance to school districts for driver education in the public school. The survey also found that participation by the school district was voluntary in nearly all those states. Hence, many 16 year-olds have to purchase driver training through private vendors. In many states,

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<sup>1</sup> The number of licensed drivers is based on 2001 data but the number of fatal crashes is 2002 data. It is expected that relationship between licensed drivers and fatal crashes will remain the same when 2002 licensing data becomes available.

private driver training is offered by small businesses – “mom and pop” operations consisting of one or two persons. There are no federal guidelines for driver education, no minimum core curriculum, no uniform teacher certification standards and little state regulation of private vendors. As a result, the quality of driver education varies tremendously.

Most driver education programs provide minimal training. These courses typically offer 30 hours of in-classroom training with six hours of supervised on-the-road experience. The classroom training may consist of videos with some discussion about the importance of safety belts and the need to avoid impaired driving. The purpose of this type of training is ostensibly to help young drivers pass their state driver education exam in as little time as possible. Further, there is little evaluation of the training by students, parents or educators.

The cost of private or public driver education puts the course out of reach for those who can least afford it. A typical driver education program can cost \$200 - \$300 or more. The newer driver education programs that focus on skills training may cost \$700 - \$1,000. While these newer courses are an improvement over the standard private driver-training course, their costliness limits their use to certain segments of the population. As a result, low-income young drivers may take to the road with little or no formal training.

Additionally, there is a great deal of uncertainty about the effectiveness of driver training. The DeKalb study, analyses by Paul Zador et. al. and more recent research by the Traffic Injury Research Foundation of Canada (TIRF) for the IIHS have raised questions about the efficacy of driver education. A 1978 Zador study found that driver education resulted in an increase in driver licensing by teenagers without a corresponding decrease in motor vehicle crashes. The 1998 TIRF study found that driver education, by itself, “produces no beneficial advantage in reducing collisions compared with informal training.” Additional work by the IIHS found that the greater availability of driver education led to earlier licensure, which, in turn, led to more crashes per capita. The 2002 TIRF study which summarized international research literature on driver education found little evidence that driver education was an effective safety countermeasure. The study concluded that driver education might be more effective if it was empirically based and addressed critical age and experience related factors such as risk taking behavior.

### **Graduated Driver Licensing**

Questions about the effectiveness of driver education have, in part, led to the enactment of graduated licensing laws. Under graduated licensing, a young driver is trained using a gradual, phased-in approach. This allows young drivers to gain on-the-road driving experience under supervised, relatively low risk conditions.

A typical graduated licensing law has three stages – a learner stage, an intermediate or provisional stage and full licensure. Under the learner stage, a novice young driver is required to fulfill a specified number of supervised hours of driving, sometimes following mandatory driver training. The provisional stage is typically not granted for several months and may include nighttime driving restrictions and passenger restrictions. This stage may last until the driver reaches age 18. If the driver receives a violation during the provisional stage, the “clock” is reset and the provisional stage begins again. If the violation is a serious one, the young driver may lose his/her license (unlike adult violations which may require repeat offenses before license suspension). After the driver has successfully completed the provisional stage, he or she may move to full licensure – the final stage. Research by IIHS, TIRF, the University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research and others have found that graduated licensing laws are very effectiveness and sharply reduce teen crashes during the first six months of licensure – the highest risk period for young drivers.

According to IIHS, thirty-five states and the District of Columbia have three-staged graduated driving licensing system. However, only a few states have enacted all the elements of an

ideal system as defined by IIHS and the National Transportation Safety Board. The goal, then, is to encourage the remaining states to enact such laws and to strengthen the laws in states that already have them.

GHSA supports graduated driver licensing for novice drivers, particularly teenaged drivers. Recognizing that driving is a complex task and that skills increase with experience, GHSA encourages all states to enact a 3-staged graduated driver's license legislation and implement a graduated driver's license program that includes such components as: a specific minimum age for a learner's permit, a provisional permit that is granted several months after the learner's permit and before a full license; adult supervision of learners; nighttime driving restrictions; mandatory safety belt use; restricted number of passengers; distinctive provisional driver's license; zero tolerance for alcohol; and license suspension for any impaired driving conviction or implied consent refusal.

### **Driver Education in the Future**

While the recent evaluations of driver education have stimulated the enactment of graduated driver licensing laws, they, disappointingly, have not led to renewed efforts to enhance the effectiveness of driver education. There is one exception to this finding. The American Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association (ADTSEA), funded by a grant from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), has developed a lengthy standardized curriculum that teaches young drivers about vehicle handling, risk perceptions and a number of other topics. The ADTSEA curriculum also includes a number of supervised driving lessons and recommendations for evaluating components of the enhanced driving training program. However, there has not yet been a systematic deployment of the ADTSEA curriculum or an evaluation to determine whether it is effective or not.

New driver education programs should be developed that would complement graduated licensing laws. These programs should, at a minimum, focus on vehicle handling and crash avoidance, driver behavior and risk reduction, roadway features and their safety implications, and vehicle-road user interactions for all types of vehicles and road users (e.g., car-truck, pedestrian-car, etc.). They should also involve driving ranges or tracks where a student is taken through a number of different driving scenarios in order to provide real-world driving experience under tightly supervised conditions. There should be learning components specifically geared to the parents of young drivers. The curricula should take advantage of current adult learning research and should utilize new technologies such as the Internet and computer simulations. GHSA firmly believes that the time is right to refocus on driver education, particularly since the remaining states with publicly funded driver education are likely to reduce or eliminate those programs over the next several years. Enhanced driver education of this type, coupled with strengthened graduated licensing laws, will go a long way to reducing young deaths and injuries on the nation's highways.

### **Real World Driver Program**

In May, Ford Motor Company and GHSA launched a new public awareness program that focuses on young drivers. The purpose of the *Real World Driver* program is to raise public awareness about the dangers of teen driving and to provide young drivers and their parents with a tool for addressing this issue. Materials about the program can be found on the web site, [www.realworlddriver.com](http://www.realworlddriver.com) and on the press table.

Real World Driver focuses on four driving skills: hazard recognition, vehicle handling, space management and speed management. The skills are based on research and statistics and are endorsed by an advisory panel of highway safety experts. *Real World Driver* is designed to educate both parents and teens via educational kits that have been sent to every public high school in the country (more than 20,000 schools). The materials have reached an estimated 4 million students and their parents. They consist of a ½ hour video, a teacher's

guide, a take home letter for parents, 25 copies of the *Real World Driver* brochure and a *Real World Driver* poster. All materials promote the *Real World Driver* website and e-learning component.

The centerpiece of the program is the video that takes the viewer through each of the four safety areas and provides tips on how to improve driving safety and performance. The video is also available over the web site, and teenagers are enticed to view it and earn small prizes.

Since the national launch, Ford and GHSA have begun a series of regional launches. The most recent one was held in Boston, MA on October 16. Additional launches are planned for Chicago on November 4 and San Francisco on November 21. At each regional launch, there is also a Ride and Drive, sponsored by Car and Driver Magazine, in which a sampling of young drivers are taken on a driving track where the four driving skills are demonstrated.

It should be emphasized that the *Real World Driver* program is not a driver education program. One of the goals of the program is to raise the visibility of the driver training issue and to encourage national discussion about the most effective way to teach young persons to drive safely. In that respect, Ford and GHSA believe that the *Real World Driver* program has been very successful.

### **Conclusions**

In summary, driver education in the past has not been shown to be very successful. However, there is renewed interest in young drivers by both the public and private sectors and increased public discussion about how to teach young persons to drive safely. This is occurring at a time when there is increased attention on graduated licensing laws.

NHTSA should continue to focus on the development of driver education programs that would complement enhanced graduated licensing laws. NHTSA should also demonstrate the ADTSEA curriculum in a small number of jurisdictions and determine whether or not it is effective. NHTSA, the private sector and the states should continue to explore innovative ways to train young drivers in a cost-effective manner. Additionally, further research should be conducted on the behavior of young drivers and the results of that research should help guide development of new driver education efforts.

The alternative is to simply give up the desire to train new drivers. This means that we declare that the status quo is acceptable. However, this also means we pass along the responsibility for delivering almost 4,000 death messages to parents each year, 333 every month, 75 every week, 10 every day. This is not a highway safety program that would make me proud.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate and for the invitation to be a part of your research on driver education and training.