

Commonwealth of Virginia's Strategic Highway Safety Plan 2006-2010

In 2006, Virginia Secretary of Transportation Pierce R. Homer signed into action the Commonwealth's first Strategic Highway Safety Plan. The plan is an accumulation of the work of the Surface Transportation Safety Executive Committee. The Committee was asked to examine and evaluate ways to improve the Commonwealth's safety record on our streets and highways for all travelers. Under multi-secretariat direction, which also includes the Secretaries of Public Safety, Education, and Health and Human Resources, this plan was developed to combat one of Virginia's top health issues. In the document's introduction, Secretary Homer pointed out that more than 900 people were killed in traffic crashes on Virginia's roads last year and more than 76,000 were injured. Motor vehicle crashes affect the Commonwealth's citizens—in particular its youth—more than any other disease. The Strategic Highway Safety Plan addresses long-standing safety issues with a renewed cooperation among multiple government agencies and their private sector and non-profit counterparts, according to Secretary Homer. The plan also recognizes that transportation safety is a personal and shared responsibility for all of Virginia's residents and visitors traveling on our roadways. The plan includes the following:

Virginia's Mission Statement:

To save lives and to reduce injuries from motor vehicle crashes in Virginia through the integration of education, enforcement, engineering, and emergency response actions.

Virginia's Vision Statement:

To make Virginia's surface transportation system the safest in the nation by 2025.

Virginia's 2010 Goals:

- To reduce from 2005 levels, the annual number of injuries and deaths due to motor vehicle crashes in Virginia by 100 deaths and 4,000 injuries by 2010.
- These goals are based on implementation of many strategies identified in the plan. Many of the public policy strategies outlined in the plan are necessary to successfully meet these ambitious goals.

Virginia's Transportation Safety Emphasis Area:

Providing the most efficient and safest surface transportation facilities is of critical importance. The primary performance measures for transportation safety area reductions in annual injuries and deaths that occur statewide. To enhance

and ensure that Virginia's highway facilities are among the safest in the country, the committee selected three emphasis areas to direct our safety programs. The following emphasis areas provide the substance of the Strategic Highway Safety Plan:

Human Factors

- Driver behavior
- Special users
- Pedestrian and bicyclist safety

Environmental

- Intersection safety
- Roadway departures
- Work zone safety
- Pedestrian and bicycle safety

Fundamental Emphasis Area

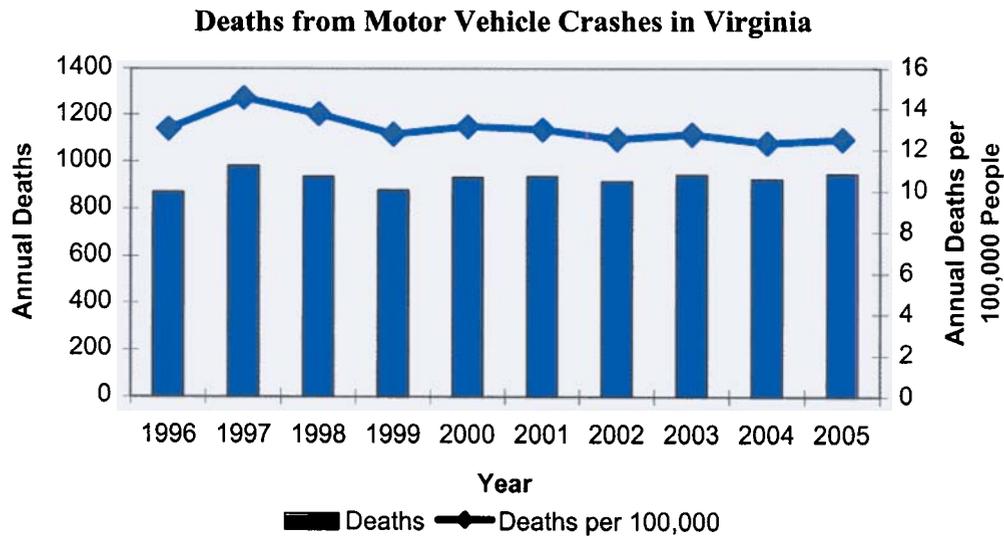
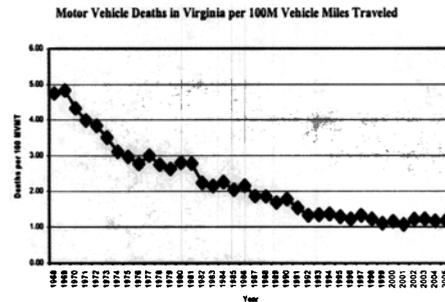
- Traffic records
- Transportation safety planning

The Strategic Highway Safety Plan's elements were developed using Virginia vehicle crash data from 2001 to 2005.

As a means of information and coordination, the Executive Summary of the Commonwealth of Virginia's Strategic Highway Safety Plan 2006-2010 is included as an Appendix to the Danville MPO's Constrained Long-Range Plan. The complete plan may be viewed by visiting the following website: <http://www.vdot.virginia.gov/info/hwysafetyplan.asp> .

Executive Summary

In the past, the Commonwealth of Virginia has viewed motor vehicle crashes as mainly a transportation issue. Injuries and deaths were compared using traditional transportation-oriented measures such as the number of vehicle miles traveled (VMT), the level of congestion, or the type of facility. Virginia has the 12th safest system in the country by these measures and our death rate has shown a reduction over time.

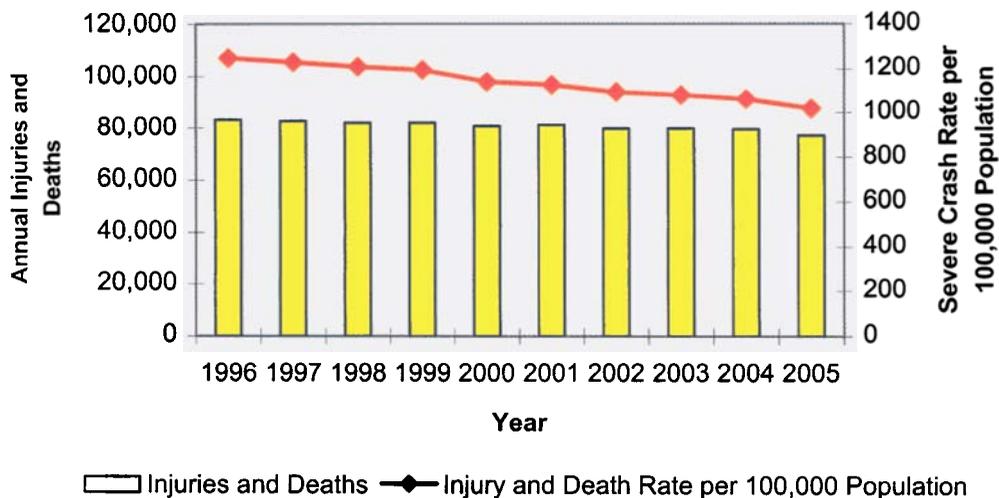


However, this death rate reduction has been due to increased vehicle miles traveled, not from reducing the number of people injured or killed. Safety experts from across the country are adopting a multi-perspective approach by changing from a transportation-based measure (crashes per million VMT) to a health-based measure (per 100,000 population). In addition, focus is shifting towards severe crashes involving deaths as well as injuries based on several important factors:

1. Crash severity is unpredictable and based upon vehicle, driver, and roadway characteristics. As a result, a serious injury could be a death or vice versa.
2. The strategies identified in this plan address all severe crashes.
3. Those injured and their families have to live with the results of severe crashes.

Transportation safety public policy in the United States as well as in Virginia has focused on crash survivability and not crash prevention. Although significant progress has been made in improving vehicle and roadway safety; driver behavior has become worse, and other countries have surpassed us in making significant reductions in injuries and deaths from motor vehicle crashes.¹ To keep pace with our counterparts in the industrialized

Annual Injury and Deaths from Severe Crashes in Virginia



world, focus must be shifted to correcting poor driver behavior and providing information about unexpected roadway and traffic conditions ahead. Intensified traffic law enforcement with focused education efforts, and strong adjudication is necessary to correct poor driver behavior. Engineering measures and vehicle safety improvements will continue to have long-term safety benefits as they take longer to deploy.

This plan details all safety partner efforts to improve traffic safety in Virginia. It establishes a transportation safety charter and sets up realistic goals for reducing annual deaths by 100 and annual injuries by 4,000 from motor vehicle crashes statewide within the next five years. A multi-perspective approach is adopted to identify problems in three emphasis areas: human factors, environmental and fundamental. Countermeasures address these problems based on current research, intense discussions with safety partners, and experience.

The top measures to reduce injuries and deaths in Virginia are identified as:

- Raise public awareness and develop a safer driving culture.
- Focus on young drivers, aggressive drivers, impaired drivers and seat belt use through legislation, education, enforcement, and adjudication.
- Improve intersection safety for all users in congested areas.
- Keep drivers on the roadway and minimize consequences if they depart.
- Incorporate transportation safety planning into all levels of government.
- Improve traffic records system to be more accurate and up to date.

With strong support from our safety partners, and Virginia citizens, we are confident that the implementation of this plan will bring transportation safety in Virginia to a new level and ultimately realize the goal of providing the safest transportation system in the nation.