Traffic Safety Council Notes

January 5, 2006

Members present: Major Dan Lonsdorf (BOTS), John Corbin (DTSD), Steve Olson (OPA), Carolyn Bourie (OPBF), Dennis Hughes (BOTS), Joe Nestler (BOTS), Jerry Zogg (DTSD), Xiao Qin (UW-TOPS), Patrick Fernan (DMV), Mary McDonough (FHWA), and Tim McClain (BOTS).

1. 2005 Year-End Fatality Review (Dennis Hughes)

Dennis provided an overview of the preliminary 2005 fatality statistics and noted that they are subject to change. Currently (note: these statistics were updated by Tim McClain as of 1/19/06) there have been 800 fatalities resulting from 699 fatal crashes. Comparing 2005 figures to 2004, fatalities are up 2% and fatal crashes are down 2%. He stated that the overall numbers appeared to be typical compared to previous years.

Dennis indicated that March through July typically is the peak season for fatalities and 2005 was no different. He stated that the winter months usually result in fewer fatalities due to drivers slowing down for the conditions. Although driver fatalities were down 4% compared to 2004, passenger fatalities were up 22% for all vehicles. Dennis noted that there didn’t seem to be a simple explanation to explain this decrease though belt use may be a factor (approximately 60% of passenger fatalities were not belted in 2005). In addition, fatalities among pedestrians decreased 25% statewide largely due to 11 fewer pedestrian fatalities in Milwaukee compared to 2004 (may be related to enforcement of drunk pedestrians).

He also noted that drinking and driving, belt use and speed are typically issues that the State Patrol focuses on in explaining fatality statistics to the media at this time of year. Major Lonsdorf noted that the long-term trend for exposure (speed, alcohol, drugs, unlicensed drivers) continues to be on the increase.

Steve Olson asked why Minnesota’s fatality rate has been lower in comparison to Wisconsin. Dennis suggested that, unlike Wisconsin, one-half of Minnesota’s population lives in urban areas where there is higher belt use and fatalities are less compared to rural areas. Dan stated that Minnesota’s State Patrol also does more enforcement of urban expressways compared to Wisconsin. Mary McDonough stated that the driver orientation/culture is different in both Illinois and Minnesota compared to Wisconsin.

Joe Nestler noted the use of message boards in Illinois and wondered if they could be utilized more in Wisconsin during the summer fatality peak and for other purposes to make drivers more alert. John Corbin stated that WisDOT/DTSD has discouraged the use of automated signs because of the concern that it distracts drivers and draws attention away from problems/issues in the immediate area of the roadway. He also indicated that no proof could be found in the literature that repeating safety messages actually work but suggested that media campaigns have merits. He suggested that an integrated media approach involving the entire department is needed.
Jerry Zogg questioned how the TSC/Department could truly, take a more integrated approach on safety such as using the “Three E’s” of engineering, education and enforcement. Major Lonsdorf noted that one important purpose of the TSC is to help make safety part of the culture and that this is facilitated through information sharing among TSC members who represent the various divisions of WisDOT in addition to the national perspective represented by FHWA. Major Lonsdorf also indicated that this information also flows to the executive board when he brings safety issues/initiatives to that body.

John Corbin noted that, when looking at Wisconsin crash statistics, the rural Interstate system has not been a major component of fatal crashes (compared to fatalities on the rural 2-lane roads). As a result, the Department needs to be reminded of this with respect to policy considerations involving increasing speeds on the Interstate.

Mary McDonough also questioned how many of the highway fatalities were a result of roadway departure and noted that in Virginia, the figure was around 79%. She suggested that motorists and others need to be educated on this issue.

2. Strategic Highway Safety Plan Update and Discussion (Major Dan Lonsdorf)

Major Lonsdorf stated that the deadline for working groups to submit their draft reports (to Carolyn Bourie) on each issue area is January 31, 2006. After some discussion, it appeared that most of the groups are on track and will hopefully meet the deadline. Tim McClain indicated that he would send a reminder to the leaders of each group and copy the plan sponsors and also indicate that the plan sponsors are ultimately responsible for implementation of the strategies.

3. 2006 WI Integrated Highway Safety Performance Plan (Major Dan Lonsdorf)

Major Lonsdorf distributed copies of the newly released 2006 highway safety performance plan. The stated mission of the annual plan is to “coordinate a statewide behavioral highway safety program, making effective use of federal and state Highway Safety funds and other resources, and provides leadership, innovation and program support in partnership with traffic safety activists, professionals and organizations to save lives and reduce injuries on Wisconsin roads.” Major Lonsdorf stated that BOTS is interested in any input/comments/suggestions that the TSC might have regarding the plan.

He also noted that the plan has been streamlined and reduced in size compared to previous versions in order to help the plan get more to the point and become more effective.

Carolyn Bourie asked about why the dollar amounts in the plan were split evenly between media campaigns and enforcement and wondered why there shouldn’t be more $$$ placed into enforcement. Major Lonsdorf indicated that the split is consistent with the national model and that the $$ amounts were in the correct balance.
John Corbin stated that the plan was developed using a very “narrow and closed process” in that it was conceived and developed internally by BOTS staff. He suggested that more input was needed at the beginning of the process from other divisions on this plan. He also noted that it would be helpful to have effective input on other plans that touch on highway safety such as the Highway Safety Improvement Program and the Highway Operations plan. He suggested that if the TSC was given the authority to review and approve all of these plans, that the TSC would be viewed as more effective within the Department.

Joe Nestler noted that as TSC members continue to work together as they have been, that the group will evolve to become more effective and influential.

Major Lonsdorf stated that although BOTS developed the plan, conversations and influences from other divisions, groups and individuals permeate the plan throughout. He indicated that there are also constraints of sharing the document with others when there are specific deadlines that must be met by NHTSA. He noted that the plan will be given to the Governor’s Council on Highway Safety for their review/input at their next meeting on January 9th.

4. Membership Reports

Steve Olson: Will meet with BOTS staff regarding “click it or ticket” campaign in May.

Xiao Qin: Traffic Safety Engineering Workgroup will meet on 1/9/06 and will discuss/finalize draft report for Strategic Highway Safety Plan on the four engineering issues to be addressed in the plan.

John Corbin: There is a conflict with the WisDOT Backbone Committee meeting and the TSC meeting (both scheduled for 3/2/06). Tim McClain will check with Joe Nestler/Darren Schoer to see what can be resolved (update: Backbone meeting will be rescheduled to 3/9/06. Please check with Darren Schoer for exact date). John noted that the FHWA workshop, “New Approaches to Highway Safety Analysis”, will be conducted March 28-30 in Wisconsin Dells/Best Western (see 12/1/05 meeting notes for more details).

Mary McDonough: Mary has accepted a new position as a team leader at FHWA Headquarters in Washington, D.C. focusing on the issue of roadway departures. The group wished Mary their best in her new position.

Next meeting will be in Room 701 (Waukesha Room) at 9:30AM on Thursday, February 2, 2006

Submitted by Tim McClain, State Patrol/BOTS (1/19/06)