

Center for Excellence in Rural Safety



Home	About CERS	Research	Events	Profiles in Rural Safety	News & Media	Publications
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[Home](#) > [Publications](#) > [Rural Safety News](#) > September 2009

Rural Safety News



News from the Center for Excellence in Rural Safety

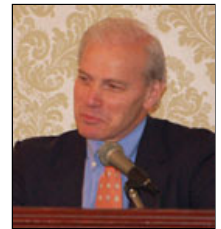
[Previous issues](#) September 2009 - Vol. 3, No. 3

Rural Safety News is an electronic newsletter of the [Center for Excellence in Rural Safety \(CERS\)](#) at the University of Minnesota. *Rural Safety News* brings you the latest research and resources concerning rural safety.

- In this issue:**
- [Summer Institute](#) explores strategies for improving rural traffic safety
 - [Profiles in Safety: Taking a wider view](#)
 - [Oct. 12 CERS seminar](#) to examines behavioral and situational aspects of motorcycle collisions
 - [Toward Zero Deaths: A National Movement](#)
 - [NHTSA Web site](#) has 2008 fatality data and new Web mapping tool
 - [More rural safety news and resources](#)

Summer Institute explores strategies for improving rural traffic safety

"We've pretty much, in my view, lost our way in surface transportation policy," said Emil Frankel, director of transportation policy with the Bipartisan Policy Center.



Emil Frankel

Frankel, calling for true policy reform, joined leading state and national traffic safety researchers, policymakers, and professionals to consider how rural traffic safety might fare in new transportation funding legislation. The remarks came during the Center for Excellence in Rural Safety's annual Summer Institute on August 3 and 4, 2009. The two-day event, held this year in Williamsburg, Virginia, was co-hosted by the Virginia Department of Transportation.

The event focused on a variety of rural transportation safety topics, including the role of rural safety in meeting a national safety goal, state and local initiatives, the latest research and technology, and political perspectives. Determining rural safety priorities for new federal transportation funding legislation to succeed SAFETEA-LU, which expires this fall, framed much of the discussion throughout the two days.

"As we shape the new bill, if there is an extension period, I don't think we can afford to lose the time and the opportunity," Frankel said during his keynote speech. "We need to begin the process which Congressman Oberstar and others have called for—fundamentally redefining the federal role in surface transportation and a significant reformation of federal programs, including highway safety."



The Summer Institute also featured speakers from Virginia, the Washington, D.C., area, Minnesota, and across the nation, from Vermont to California. Featured speakers included David Heymsfeld, staff director of the U.S. House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure; Joe Toole, associate administrator for safety, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA); Jack Basso, director of program finance and management, American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO); Dave Ekern, commissioner of the Virginia Department of Transportation; Pete Rahn, director of the Missouri Department of Transportation; and Barbara Harsha, executive director of the Governors Highway Safety Association (GSHA).

During opening remarks, CERS director Lee Munnich set the stage for the annual event with a review of the Center's mission, focus, capabilities, and accomplishments. He explained that CERS is particularly focused on raising awareness and understanding of rural safety issues, especially among policymakers, because the rate of U.S. traffic fatalities in rural areas is more than twice that of urban areas. "Even though we've seen reductions in fatalities, we all know we have a long ways to go," he said. "We want to build on the momentum that we've seen already."

Next, a broad range of presentations inspired discussion largely focused on finding a clear national consensus for effective, workable solutions to improve rural traffic safety. Many alluded to the significant opportunity at hand as the federal funding authorization process heats up, hoping to craft a seminal piece of legislation to shape transportation in the 21st century. In addition to severe funding constraints as the result of a troubled economy, coordination of efforts among government agencies down to the local level and cultural complacency toward safety remain significant challenges.

Other speakers representing the University of Minnesota included CERS research director Tom Horan, who provided an overview of the newly enhanced SafeRoadMaps.org as well as an update about CERS research into rural emergency response times and the quality of health care outcomes; Gina Baas, CERS program delivery director, who highlighted communications, a growing list of program partners, and the development of safety training for local practitioners and policymakers; Keith Knapp, CERS director of transportation safety engineering, who discussed his research about a rural safety policy improvement index; and Max Donath, director of the Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) Institute at the University of Minnesota, who described a variety of available technologies with the capability to reduce rural fatalities and life-changing crashes.

This was the fourth meeting of an annual Summer Institute held by the University of Minnesota's Center for Excellence in Rural Safety (CERS). The

two-day gathering, previously held in Duluth, Minnesota (2006), Burlington, Vermont (2007), and Santa Rosa, California (2008), is aimed at sharing information, setting research priorities, and developing strategies for improving rural transportation safety.

Related Resources:

- [2009 CERS Summer Institute overview](#)
- [2009 CERS Summer Institute program and presentations](#)

Profiles in Safety: Taking a wider view

A system-wide approach to highway safety delivers results in Missouri



Pete Rahn

Missouri is no stranger to rural road safety issues. More than 70 percent of fatal crashes on the state system happen on rural roads.

Year after year, the same mistakes continue to cause the majority of the state's fatal crashes: no seat belt, run off the road, aggressive driving, curves and impaired driving. They're all problems that frequently plague rural highways. And, they're all driver mistakes. But, don't tell Pete Rahn there is nothing the transportation community can do to stop these fatalities from occurring.

"One of my frustrations has been the attitude within many departments of transportation that we can't control the fatalities occurring on our systems," said Rahn. "I know there are things we can do to drive those numbers down."

It may sound like a bold statement, but Rahn is in a position to know. For the past five years, he has served as director of the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT). He is also the immediate past president of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, and he led New Mexico's DOT for eight years.

In Missouri, Rahn has piloted a unique approach to highway safety. Rahn's method relies on uniform safety improvements across the entire highway system. He rejects the idea of pursuing improvements only at high-crash locations.

"A system-wide application is our solution," said Rahn. "You cannot chase locations. When you have solutions you must apply them system-wide. The locations of fatal crashes are random, but the reasons they occur are not."

High-volume highway miles are the focus of the state's system-wide improvements. In Missouri, 16 percent of highway miles carry more than 80 percent of traffic. MoDOT singled out those miles for safety upgrades.

The solutions MoDOT has implemented on those highway miles are innovative and effective. The state has installed more than 500 miles of median guard cable, virtually eliminating cross-median fatalities. They also use "shared four-lane roadways"—three-lane roadways that alternate the passing lane every two miles. Shared four-lane roadways cost 75 percent less than a four-lane highway, increase travel speeds, and reduce crashes by 55 percent compared with a two-lane road.

Other safety improvements are especially effective in rural areas. These include enhancing the driving surface with wide six-inch stripes, four-foot shoulders, and rumble stripes on the edgeline and centerline. MoDOT has also increased sign size, added speed plaques to every curve sign, installed emergency reference markers, added chevrons and reflectors, increased clear zones, and painted edgelines. Rural emergency response and rural intelligent transportation systems have also been enhanced.

"At night, we want our roadways to look like airport runways," said Rahn. "When you set that kind of a standard it really makes a difference."

The difference is evident in the numbers. The Missouri approach has driven a reduction in crash fatalities from 1,257 in 2005 to 960 in 2008. Rural crashes also dropped significantly under Rahn's watch: from 796 in 2005 to 599 in 2008. The state's goal is to reduce total fatalities below 850 by 2012. According to Rahn, it's a goal the state is on track to meet well in advance of the deadline. Once it's met a new goal will be set, and ongoing improvements will continue to save the lives of Missouri drivers.

Related resources:

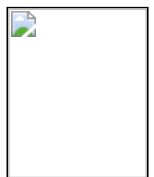
- [View Pete Rahn's Rural Safety Presentation](#) (29.6 MB PDF)
- [Visit the MoDOT Safety Website](#)

Oct. 12 CERS seminar to examines behavioral and situational aspects of motorcycle collisions

CERS will host a seminar October 12, 2009, from 1-2 p.m. CDT, at the University of Minnesota featuring Samuel Nunn, public and environmental affairs professor and director of the Center for Criminal Justice Research at Indiana University-Purdue University in Indianapolis, Indiana. Nunn's presentation is titled "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Exploring the Comparative Effects of Behavioral and Situational Correlates and Objects of Impact in the Injury Outcomes of Motorcycle Collisions."

In the US, motorcyclists continue to contribute disproportionately to traffic fatalities and serious injuries—in 2008, motorcycles were about 3 percent of vehicle registrations while motorcyclists represented 14 percent of traffic fatalities. Previous research contains much evidence about correlates of motorcycle collisions. Injury outcomes depend on the characteristics of motorcycle operators and collision circumstances. However, existing analyses are seldom parsed into the comparative impacts of individual characteristics, behavioral choices, and the situational context of the collision.

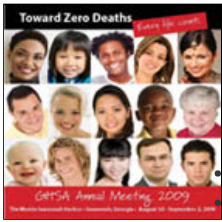
A free video Webcast of this event will be broadcast live on the Web and available for later viewing. The CERS Web site has [more information about the seminar](#).



Samuel Nunn

Toward Zero Deaths: A National Movement

"Toward Zero Deaths: Every Life Counts" was the theme of the Governor's Highway Safety Association (GHSA) 2009 Annual Meeting in Savannah, Georgia, August 30-September 2, 2009. The GHSA has adopted the Toward Zero Deaths vision, which has been the highway safety focus for Minnesota and several other states. Following the GHSA conference, the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) hosted a stakeholder workshop on "Creating a National Strategic Highway Safety Plan."



CERS director Lee Munnich presented the SafeRoadMaps.org Web site for mapping roadway fatalities during a session on rural highway safety. "Rural safety was a major focus of both the GHSA and AASHTO meetings," Munnich said. "Everyone recognizes that in order to significantly reduce road fatalities in the United States, you need a strategy for rural areas, where most of these fatalities occur."

Related resources:

- [GHSA 2009 Annual Meeting \("Toward Zero Deaths: Every Life Counts"\)](#)
- [Governors Highway Safety Association \(GHSA\)](#)

NHTSA Web site has 2008 fatality data and new Web mapping tool

The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) Web site now has 2008 fatality data by state as well as a new interactive mapping tool. Check out the [NHTSA Web mapping tool](#) and please give us your thoughts on how it compares with CERS [SafeRoadMaps.org](#).

- [Send comments](#)

More rural safety news and resources

The Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA) has announced the availability of a new publication, [Closing the Circle: A Multicultural Primer for State Highway Safety Offices](#). The resource was developed by GHSA with a grant from State Farm. According to the U.S. Census Department, multicultural groups that now represent about one third of the population are expected to become the majority in 2042. The new tool outlines various guidelines that will help State Highway Safety Offices (SHSOs) in their outreach to multicultural groups both at the state and local level.

Rural Highway Safety Clearinghouse

Selected recent additions:

- [Crash Analysis of Roundabouts at High-Speed Rural Intersections](#) (860 KB PDF)
Transportation Research Board (2009)
- [Evaluation of Iowa's 70 mph Speed Limit -- 2.5 Year Update](#) (1.1 MB PDF)
Center for Transportation Research and Education, Iowa State University; Iowa Department of Transportation (2009)
- [Evaluation of Rumble Stripes on Low-Volume Rural Roads in Iowa—Phase I](#) (5.0 MB PDF)
Center for Transportation Research and Education, Iowa State University (2009)
- [Highway Accident Report: Motorcoach Run-Off-the-Road and Rollover, U.S. Route 163, Mexican Hat, Utah, January 6, 2008](#) (2.0 MB PDF)
National Transportation Safety Board (2009)
- [Improving Safety for Slow Moving Vehicles on Iowa's High Speed Rural Roadways](#) (13 MB PDF)
Center for Transportation Research and Education, Iowa State University; Iowa Department of Transportation (2009)
- [Improving the Safety of Mobile Lane Closures](#) (2.0 MB PDF)
Transportation Research Board (2009)
- [Reducing Work Zone Crashes by Using Vehicle's Flashers as a Warning Sign](#) (1.9 MB PDF)
Kansas Department of Transportation (2009)
- [Safety Effectiveness of Lane and Shoulder Width Combinations on Rural, Two-Lane, Undivided Roads](#) (265 KB PDF)
Transportation Research Board (2009)
- [SHRP 2 Naturalistic Driving Study Brochure](#) (230 KB PDF)
Transportation Research Board (2009)
- [Speed Limit-Related Issues on Gravel Roads](#) (4.0 MB PDF)
Kansas Department of Transportation (2009)