SAFETY FOCUS

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This issue features a brief summary of the November 2 elections' implications for photo enforcement; the recently-released audit of Los Angeles' Photo Red Light Program; a summary of the second annual national Distracted Driving Summit; the results of a recently-conducted poll on the behavioral affects of red light cameras; and a review of a recently-released study on rural safety policy improvements.

Photo Enforcement Loses on Election Day

As a result of the November 2 elections, many communities across the country will be without photo enforcement. From long-standing photo enforcement programs, to new ones, to communities that have never had photo enforcement, voters struck the notion while filling out their ballots.

Although Anaheim, CA, did not have red light cameras, voters were given the option of banning future installation in the city's intersections. The Orange County Registrar of Voters website reported that roughly 73 percent who voted on the measure voted to prohibit red light cameras.

According to the Cleveland Plain Dealer, Garfield Heights, OH, narrowly eliminated the use of photo enforcement with 115 votes - a victory margin of less than 1 percent. The community took its mobile traffic cameras off the street the day after the election.

The City of Houston's Proposition 3 asked voters if there should be continued use of red light cameras to enforce state or local laws relating to traffic safety. Approximately 47 percent of voters marked their ballots to keep the cameras, while 53 percent voted to remove the cameras. Although the cameras lacked the support of Houston's citizens, Gary Blankinship from the Houston Police Officer's Union told My Fox Houston that, "while the cameras brought in millions for the police department, they also saved lives by preventing deadly accidents on the streets."

Second Distracted Driving Summit marks progress, outlines goals

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) held the second national Distracted Driving Summit on September 21, 2010 in Washington, DC. The meeting commenced with DOT Secretary Ray LaHood announcing new anti-distracted driving regulations and policies, such as a new rulemaking that would prohibit commercial truck drivers from texting while transporting hazardous materials. LaHood also boasted progress on two rules proposed at the first Distracted Driving Summit, held in 2009, which have now become law: commercial bus and truck drivers are banned from texting on the job, and train operators are restricted from using cell phones and other electronic devices while in the driver's seat.

"We are taking action on a number of fronts to address the epidemic of distracted driving in America," LaHood stated at the Summit. "With the help of the experts, policymakers and safety advocates we've assembled here, we are going to do everything we can to put an end to distracted driving and save lives."

DOT has been working closely with the Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS) to encourage private sector companies to put forward anti-distracted driving policies. During the summit, DOT and NETS announced that almost 1,600 U.S. companies and organizations have implemented anti-distracted driving polices, accounting for 10.5 million U.S. workers.

"I am thrilled that businesses across the country are making anti-distracted driving policies an integral part of their employee culture," said LaHood.

These numbers are expected to grow over the next year, as an additional 550 organizations, or 1.5 million members of the U.S. workforce, plan on adopting such policies. Secretary of Labor Hilda L. Solis announced at the summit that DOT has also partnered with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to reduce distracted driving. Together, the organizations have developed a plan to further diminish the existence of distracted driving by relying on employers through tactics such as an education campaign for employers on ways to reduce occupation-related distracted driving, sharing model employer policies, and developing tactics to reach younger workforce members.

(continued on page 3)

(continued from page 2)

The National Highway and Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) also released interim results from a year-long pilot enforcement program which is still taking place in Hartford, Connecticut and Syracuse, New York. The program, titled "Phone in One Hand, Ticket in the Other," was developed to test the effectiveness in reducing distracted driving by pairing public service announcements with increased law enforcement. The interim data reveals a 65% drop in hand-held cell phone use in Hartford, and a 38% percent reduction in Syracuse. Texting while driving has been reduced by 68% in Hartford and 42% in Syracuse.

To learn more, visit www.distraction.gov.

Department of Transportation Secretary, Ray La Hood
Source: U.S. Department of Transportation

"Notable quotes"

"I understand some of the issues that people have [about the use of red light cameras] going forward," said Commissioner Suzanne Atwell. "But this is a pervasive problem and we need a solution. It's very difficult to legislate behavior, but we have to try. This is about life and death."

From an October 19th article titled "Sarasota pusuing red light cameras" by Carrie Wells of The Herald-Tribune

"Officials at the Maryland State Highway Administration say that if drivers want to keep their money, it's okay with them. The cameras function 24 hours a day where work zone hazards exist 24 hours a day. All a driver has to do to avoid a $40 ticket at one of the five locations statewide where work zone cameras have been placed is to come within 12 mph of the speed limit."

From a October 14th response to a letter to the editor titled "Candid cameras don't bring out smiles in some commuters," by Robert Thomson, a.k.a. Dr. Gridlock, published in the Washington Post

PEMCO Insurance Poll results show that traffic cameras alter behavior

Regardless of their feelings about the use of red light cameras, 55% of polled Washington State drivers say they are less likely to hit the gas at a yellow light when aware of enforced traffic cameras.

In April of 2010 PEMCO Insurance, a Seattle-based provider of auto, home, boat, life, and umbrella insurance to Washington state residents, commissioned FBK Research of Seattle to conduct a survey. This survey asked Washington drivers questions regarding driving behavior and attitudes.

Of the 635 PEMCO poll respondents:

- 64% believe that traffic cameras are at least somewhat effective in decreasing traffic violations;
- 20% feel that the cameras are not too effective; and
- 10% think that cameras are not at all effective in decreasing traffic violations.

While behaviors may change, Washington driver's attitudes regarding the number of traffic lights is in a three way split. 31 percent think the number of installed cameras is just right, another 31 percent support the installation of more cameras and 29 percent think fewer, or none, should be installed.

About the PEMCO Insurance Northwest Poll

PEMCO Insurance commissioned this independent survey that asked Washington drivers several questions about driving habits and attitudes toward current Northwest issues. The sample size, 635 respondents, yields an accuracy of +/- 4.0 percent at the 95 percent confidence level. In other words, if this study were conducted 100 times, in 95 instances the data will not vary by more than +/- 4.0 percent. Source: PEMCO

Research shows automated speed enforcement could reduce roadway fatalities by 699 per year in the United States

University of Minnesota researchers recently released the findings of their report, *Application of a Rural Safety Policy Improvement Index (RSPII) Framework: Phase 2*. The report, which was sponsored by the Center for Excellence in Rural Safety, was broken into two phases: phase one outlined six legislatively-based safety improvement measures (LSIMs) to evaluate the rural safety policy improvement index (RSPII), and phase two focused on the application of the RSPII framework – specifically, the reduction of rural roadway crash fatalities. It was estimated that each LSIM, primary enforcement of seat belt use, universal motorcycle helmet use, sobriety checkpoints, graduated driver licensing program upgrades, mandatory ignition interlocks and automated speed enforcement, would reduce would reduce rural roadway crash fatalities. Specifically, rural roadway crash fatalities could be reduced by 699 from automated speed enforcement.

The sixth and final LSIM chosen for research during Phase II was automated speed enforcement. This type of enforcement is typically accomplished through the use of cameras and/or radar that are capable of monitoring and recording the speed of a vehicle on the roadway. It was beneficial to examine the potential safety impact of automated speed enforcement since speed is a main contributing factor to fatal crashes along rural roadways and the severity of injuries worsens with an increase in speed.

CERS Center for Excellence in Rural Safety

There was relatively little research and data on automated speed enforcement implementation in the United States, forcing researchers to focus on studies outside the US as a benchmark. In general, these studies indicated that the implementation of automated speed enforcement can reduce both speeds and crashes. Since the application of automated speed enforcement is very limited within the United States, and almost non-existent in rural areas, all 50 states were considered to have an applicable “before” status for this LSIM and would benefit from implementation of automated speed enforcement.

The target group for this safety improvement includes those crash fatalities defined as speed-related. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration definition of a speed-related crash includes those that involve a driver charged with a speeding-related offense and/or if a contributing factor to the crash was racing, driving too fast for conditions, or exceeding the posted speed limit.

continued on page 6

continued from page 5

For analysis purposes, the project team applied the a 20 percent reduction to half of the total number of rural roadway speed-related fatalities since speed is usually only one of many other factors which result in an accident.

In other words, it recognizes that the target groups of many LSIMs overlap and the one identified for automated enforcement may do so to a larger extent than the others considered in this project. This second calculation approach resulted in an estimate that 699 rural roadway fatalities could be avoided with automated speed enforcement. State by state the reductions range from zero in Rhode Island to 80 in Texas.

The report hopes that the findings on fatality reduction will be systematically applied, as needed, to quantitatively estimate the potential safety impacts of behavioral highway safety countermeasures (e.g., LSIMs) and plan for their rural and/or urban implementation.

Audit of Los Angeles' Photo Red Light Program reveals poor camera placement, mounting debt

A recently-released audit of Los Angeles' Photo Red Light Program (PRLP) revealed some worrisome flaws. Namely, the 32 cameras have cost taxpayers $2.6 million over the past two years, and even more disturbing: the cameras were not installed at all of the city's high risk intersections.

"If public safety is the number one priority of the Photo Red Light Program, then the most dangerous intersections should be selected, period," said Los Angeles City Controller Wendy Greuel in a press release put out by her office. "Regardless of the reasons, the cameras are only effective if they're placed at the most dangerous intersections. If we don't use them effectively we're putting Angelenos lives in danger."

Some of the most accident-prone intersections in L.A. do not have photo enforcement. This is partly due to a 2006 decision by the city council to place at least one camera in each district. In doing so, two accident prone intersections, with a combined 24 accidents and two fatalities from 2003-2005, did not receive cameras, while an intersection with only 2 accidents and no fatalities in the same period received a camera.

Only half of the intersections equipped with cameras saw a reduction in accidents, according to the audit. Inadequate data collection from the police force makes it difficult to conclude whether the cameras improved public safety.

The audit illustrates the need for government standards and regulation in planning and operating photo enforcement programs. Without standards, cities are forced to rely on parties with varying interests, such as camera vendors and city officials to make critical engineering decisions such as camera placement.