Overcoming the Unique Safety Challenges of Rural Roads
Lifesavers 2021

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Key Takeaways for Today

• Understand the rural story

• Know the importance of including rural areas as we strive for zero

• Identify the main points of Safety Culture and the Safe System Approach in a rural context

• Actionable items you can take to improve rural safety in your area
The Rural Story: What is Rural?

Source: NCHRP 20-122
The Rural Story: All Roads Are Not Created Equal
The Rural Story: Exploring the Unique Challenges

- Less resources
- Lack of communication and power infrastructure
- Lack of data
- Severe weather
- Infrastructure challenges with unpaved roads and bridges
- Fewer alternative routes
- Less sustainable options for mobility due to distance and ridership
The Rural Story: An Urban Comparison

- Population: 19% Rural, 81% Urban
- MV Fatalities: 45% Rural, 53% Urban
- Public Roadmiles: 71% Rural, 70% Urban
- Vehicle Miles Traveled: 30% Rural, 29% Urban

Source: RSC ROUTES Webinar May 2020 – NHTSA Speaker
Data Source: FARS 2018 Annual Report File (ARF); 2010 Census; FHWA Office of Highway Policy Information, Highway Statistics 2018
Why We Strive for Zero

There’s No One Someone Won’t Miss

Source: Transport Accident Commission Victoria, Australia

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2tOye9DKdQ
Achieving Zero Starts with Promoting a Positive Traffic Safety Culture

Traffic Safety Culture:

The **shared beliefs** (including values, assumptions, etc.) of a group which affect **behaviors** related to traffic safety.

Source: Traffic Safety Culture Primer, CHSC
Zero is our Goal.
A Safe System is How we Get There

Accommodating human mistakes

Keeping impacts on the human body at tolerable levels
The Safe System Approach
The 6 Safe System Principles

1. Death/serious injury is unacceptable
2. Humans make mistakes
3. Humans are vulnerable
4. Responsibility is shared
5. Safety is proactive
6. Redundancy is crucial

Slide Source: FHWA
5 Safe System Elements

- Safe Road Users
- Safe Vehicles
- Post-Crash Care
- Safe Speeds
- Safe Roads
Comparing Approaches

Traditional approach | Safe System approach
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Prevent crashes | Prevent death and serious injuries
Improve human behavior | Design for human mistakes/limitations
Control speeding | Reduce system kinetic energy
Individuals are responsible | Share responsibility
React based on crash history | Proactively identify and address risks
The 5 Safe System Elements Create Redundancy

The “Swiss Cheese Model” of redundancy creates layers of protection.

Death and serious injuries only happen when all layers fail.

Slide Source: FHWA
Where Do I Start?

- Become a rural road safety champion
- Learn more about Traffic Safety Culture and Safe System Approach
- Find partners
- Double down on what works
- Always Remember your motivation

“Implementing the Safe System approach is our shared responsibility, and we all have a role.”

-FHWA
Resources to Explore on Your Rural Journey

National Center for Rural Road Safety  
www.ruralsafetycenter.org

FHWA’s Safe System Materials  
https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/zerodeaths/zero_deaths_vision.cfm

Road to Zero  

Toward Zero Deaths & Traffic Safety Culture  
https://www.towardzerodeaths.org/traffic-safety-culture/

Vision Zero Network  
https://visionzeronetwork.org/

Center for Health and Safety Culture  
https://chsculture.org/

FHWA Proven Safety Countermeasures  
https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/provencountermeasures/

NHTSA’s Countermeasure that Work  

FoRRRwd  
https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/FoRRRwd/

LRSP DIY Site  
https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/LRSPDIY/

Rural Opportunities to Use Transportation for Economic Success (ROUTES)  
https://www.transportation.gov/rural
Contact Information

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