

G A O
Accountability · Integrity · Reliability

Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-08-1015T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Environment and Public Works, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

About 43,000 traffic fatalities occur annually, and another 290,000 people are seriously injured on the nation's roads. To reduce these numbers, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) nearly doubled funding for the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP), authorizing \$5.1 billion for 2006 through 2009. SAFETEA-LU also added requirements for states to develop strategic highway safety plans that cover all aspects of highway safety, including infrastructure, behavioral (education and enforcement), and emergency medical services projects; develop crash data analysis systems; and publicly report on the top 5 percent of hazardous locations on all their public roads. SAFETEA-LU also set aside funds for a legacy rail-highway crossing program and a new high-risk rural road program.

This testimony provides preliminary information on the implementation of HSIP since SAFETEA-LU. It is based on ongoing work that addresses (1) states' implementation of HSIP following SAFETEA-LU, (2) FHWA's guidance and assistance for states, and (3) results of HSIP to date, including for the two set-aside programs. To conduct this study, GAO visited 6 states, judgmentally selected based on highway safety attributes, analyzed plans and reports from these 6 states and 19 randomly selected states, and interviewed FHWA and state safety officials.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-1015T](#). For more information, contact Katherine A. Siggerud at (202) 512-2834 or siggerudk@gao.gov.

HIGHWAY SAFETY

Preliminary Observations on Efforts to Implement Changes in the Highway Safety Improvement Program Since SAFETEA-LU

What GAO Found

All states submitted strategic highway safety plans and reports listing the top 5 percent of their hazardous locations, according to FHWA. The 25 state plans GAO reviewed generally cover all aspects of highway safety, but the 25 states have not fully developed the required crash data analysis systems. FHWA and state safety officials cited the collaboration that occurred among safety stakeholders in developing the plans as a positive influence on state safety planning. Many of the 25 states lacked key components of crash data analysis systems, including crash location data, roadway characteristics data, and software for analyzing the data. As a result, most states cannot identify and rank hazardous locations on all public roads, determine appropriate remedies, and estimate costs, as required by SAFETEA-LU, and their 5 percent reports often lack required information on remedies and costs.

FHWA provided written guidance and training to assist the states, especially in preparing their strategic highway safety plans, and participated in every state's strategic safety planning process. However, FHWA has not required states to submit schedules for obtaining complete roadway characteristics data, and because states lack complete data, FHWA's guidance on the 5 percent reports did not specify a methodology. As a result, states' 5 percent reports vary widely, raising questions about how this report can be used.

It is too soon to evaluate the results of HSIP as carried out under SAFETEA-LU because states need more time to identify, implement, and evaluate projects they have undertaken since adopting their strategic highway safety plans. However, preliminary evidence indicates that some HSIP provisions may not be aligned with states' safety priorities. First, most states have not taken advantage of a new spending provision that allows states to use some HSIP funds for behavioral or emergency medical services projects, partly because a certification requirement—that all state highway safety infrastructure needs have been met—may make them reluctant to do so. Second, the rail-highway crossing set-aside program does not target the top safety priorities of some states. Lastly, states are still in the early stages of implementing the high-risk rural road set-aside program, and data limitations may make it difficult for some of them to identify qualifying projects, especially for locally owned rural roads. FHWA agreed with GAO's findings.

Rumble Strips and Cable Median Barriers to Improve Highway Safety



Source: GAO.