

MAKING **WORK ZONES** WORK BETTER

Work Zone Focus State Initiative Public Information and Outreach Strategies

In early 2005, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Work Zone Program invited six states to become part of the Work Zone Focus State Initiative. These six states - Arizona, California, Montana, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin - were given an opportunity to enhance their work zone (WZ) public information and outreach knowledge and capabilities with the ultimate goal of passing on this knowledge to other states.

FHWA chose WZ public information and outreach as the spotlight of this focus state initiative for several reasons:

- Improvement of WZ public information and outreach strategies was seen as having the greatest potential opportunity for advancing the state-of-the-practice in the shortest amount of time and at the lowest cost.
- Development and implementation of WZ public information and outreach strategies is an important component of the recently updated Work Zone Safety and Mobility Rule (23 CFR Section 630, Subpart J).
- Public information and outreach was one of the several opportunities for improvement identified in the 2003 and 2004 WZ Self Assessments.

Workshop

The initiative began with a workshop, attended by one representative from each of the FHWA Division Offices and DOTs in the six states. The workshop had two main components: an opportunity to learn from presentations on successful public outreach efforts used for a variety of different projects and a hands-on exercise. First, representatives from the Virginia DOT, the North Dakota DOT, and the North Carolina DOT spoke about the Springfield Interchange project, the I-29 through Fargo project, and the use of 511 for WZ information, respectively. Then, using a series of templates, attendees actively engaged in developing the framework for a public information and outreach strategy for a project in their states. The earlier presenters, as well as others putting on the workshop, provided assistance during this exercise.

The workshop presentations, templates, and a summary report can be found at

www.ops.fhwa.dot.gov/wz/publicinfostrategies.htm.

"I appreciated the opportunity to work so closely with my state counterpart in the development of our project's outreach plan. I never realized what was involved in a public information and outreach effort until this focus state initiative."

– Karen King, FHWA Arizona Division Office

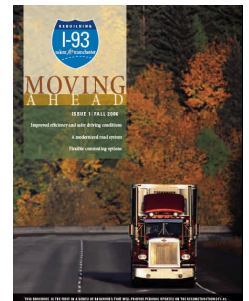
Follow Up Support

Throughout 2005 and 2006, focus state participants were given some follow up support to assist them with the implementation of their public information and outreach plans. Conference calls with the focus states were held to discuss progress on implementing the outreach plans, as well as any obstacles encountered and ideas for overcoming those obstacles. Several of the focus states asked for additional support with specific components of their outreach plans. The following sections highlight some of these efforts.

New Hampshire Rebuilding I-93

New Hampshire chose the widening of I-93 from Salem to Manchester as its project for the focus state effort. New Hampshire asked for focus state support in developing a project logo and slogan, and developing a comprehensive brochure about the project. The New Hampshire DOT representatives involved in the focus state effort wanted the slogan to describe how NHDOT was modernizing a 50-year old highway, and indicate that changes being made would help drivers get to where they were going safer and faster. The FHWA team developed several theme ideas for NHDOT to consider. As a result, the I-93 project was branded with the theme of, "Moving Ahead: Rebuilding I-93 Salem to Manchester," illustrated through the use of a highway shield.

Working with content and organizational input from NHDOT, the FHWA team also developed an eight page project brochure that incorporated the theme of Moving Ahead. This brochure will be distributed to the public and motorists to help them understand what is being done, why it is being done, the timeframe for the construction, and enhancements that will result from the project. The brochure also provides information on how to get around during construction and where to go for more information about the project.



NHDOT will continue to use the brochure and branding theme developed from the focus state effort. The shield logo and theme of rebuilding and moving ahead can be seen on other public outreach tools, most notably the project web site –

www.rebuildingi93.com. The branding theme helps drivers and others in the project area readily identify project-related information, making it an important element of the I-93 public information and outreach campaign.

"I just wanted to personally extend my appreciation to your... team that worked on the I-93 brochure for all your hard work. Without your leadership, dedication and resources the I-93 brochure would not have been possible."

– Ted Kitsis, Administrator, Bureau of Construction, New Hampshire DOT

Montana U.S. 93 The Peoples Way



Montana chose the safety and road capacity improvements to U.S. 93 from Evaro to Polson as their project for the focus state

effort. The Montana DOT chose to use focus state follow up support to assist them with enhancing the web site for the U.S. 93 project - www.93info.com/pubinvolve/us93info/default.shtml. Montana requested a comprehensive review of the web site and suggestions for improvement. This review resulted in recommendations such as:

- **Highlight important information on the homepage** - especially information that may affect motorists, such as to expect traffic detours at a particular part of the corridor, lowered speed limits, closed lanes, etc.
- **Organize the homepage by order of importance** - put the most important information at the top of the homepage so that it is the first thing users see.
- **Let users know information is current** - add a last updated date to time sensitive information, such as construction updates.
- **Make information easy to find and understand** – organize the site in an intuitive manner and simplify wording whenever possible.

Montana updated the web site using the recommendations provided and asked for a follow up review. As a result of the reviews, the U.S. 93 project web site was enhanced and continues to provide useful information for motorists driving in the project area.

California Public Outreach Evaluations

The California participants took a different approach to the focus state effort. Instead of focusing on one particular road project, California decided to evaluate the ongoing public information and outreach efforts for several projects. The goal was to use the results of these evaluations to enhance public outreach for future projects. Periodic surveys can be a useful tool for assessing and improving the effectiveness of WZ management strategies.

Three California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) projects were chosen for public outreach evaluation:

- State Route 99/120 Interchange Improvements Project (99/120).
- State Route 99/Hammer Lane Interchange Reconstruction and State Route 99 Widening Project (99/Hammer Lane).
- I-205 Tracy Bypass Widening Project.



For each evaluation, surveys were prepared by the FHWA team as part of the focus state follow up support. Caltrans administered the surveys, and FHWA then provided assistance for analyzing the survey responses.

Caltrans' overall public outreach efforts were evaluated for both the 99/120 project and the 99/Hammer Lane project. A second evaluation was done for the 99/Hammer Lane project to evaluate Caltrans' public outreach efforts during a planned night time closure. As a result of the planned closure outreach evaluation, Caltrans learned that motorists in the 99/Hammer Lane area would prefer a full freeway closure for a weekend versus daily lane closures for a month.

For the I-205 project, Caltrans chose to evaluate the use of CB Wizard technology. CB Wizard provides commercial vehicle drivers with advance warning of an approaching work zone. The evaluation was done to determine if truck drivers approaching the construction area received the message disseminated via the CB Wizard and whether the message was effective in alerting truck drivers to the work zone and diversion opportunities. The survey results showed that 69 percent of drivers with a CB radio heard the message, 79 percent of the drivers who heard the message found it to be effective, and 55 percent of the drivers who heard the message said they became more alert as a result of hearing it. Some of the other actions taken by truck drivers in response to hearing the message included slowing down (30 percent of respondents) and relaying the message to other drivers (25 percent of respondents). As a result of these positive findings, Caltrans is recommending to its WZ Safety Subcommittee the development of a new specification for when CB Wizard should be considered for use on future projects.

For More Information on Work Zone Public Information and Outreach

The following FHWA resources can be used to help enhance and improve WZ public information and outreach strategies:

- **“Work Zone Public Information Strategies”** - This guide, available at www.ops.fhwa.dot.gov/wz/resources/final_rule.htm, provides tips, examples, and practices for developing and implementing effective WZ public information and outreach campaigns.
- **FHWA WZ Web Site** – This site includes a page dedicated to WZ public information and outreach resources, available at www.ops.fhwa.dot.gov/wz/publicinfostrategies.htm.

21st Century Operations Using 21st Century Technologies