



# Georgia DOT's Efforts to Make Roads Safer Paying Off

1,744. That's roughly the population of the lovely town of Darien on Georgia's coast; or of Richland in Stewart County – home of the annual Pig Fest barbecue festival.

It's also the number of lives lost on Georgia highways in 2005. The fourth highest total of any state in the nation and a jarring wake-up call to the Georgia Department of Transportation – an agency with safety its primary mission.

Fatalities have decreased every year since and 2010 is on track to continue the positive trend. In fact, the annual number of deaths on Georgia roadways declined by 449 – some 25 percent – from 2005 to 2009. This was more than good fortune and coincidence; it also was tragedies avoided and lives saved as the result of a concerted effort by the Georgia Department of Transportation and other agencies to make Georgia's roads safer.

That effort is centered on Georgia DOT's Strategic Highway Safety Plan. That plan features data-driven emphasis areas focused on such things as affordable engineering solutions, enforcement, motorcycle safety, seatbelt use, and impaired driving.

Public awareness-building campaigns are making a tremendous difference, but there is much more going on in the continuing, behind-the-scenes implementation of the Strategic Highway Safety Plan. The Department's Office of Traffic Operations staff is refining Georgia's transportation infrastructure to improve safety and further reduce fatalities, injuries and crashes.

Every Georgia DOT project is designed and constructed to meet or exceed federal safety guidelines. But Department employees are going above and beyond the guidelines – looking for still more ways to improve safety.

One example is a focus on dividing traffic flows with the installation of medians, which have been proven to save lives. Raised medians reduce the total number of accidents by 55 percent, thus, dramatically reducing head-on collisions. Incidents involving pedestrians are typically slashed by 80 percent on urban roads with medians.

Another effort focuses on preventing vehicles from leaving roadways. Rumble strips along shoulders and centerlines, improving road drainage in wet weather and the use of reflective tape and striping to improve nighttime visibility all are part of the effort to keep Georgians safe.

If a vehicle does leave the roadway, safety measures have been implemented to minimize dangers. These include installation of cable barriers or guardrails, relocation of utility poles and removal of trees and

vegetation that present collision hazards. Georgia DOT often is criticized when trees are removed from along roadways, but collisions with trees account for more than 25 percent of all vehicle fatalities and are the most common collision object nationwide.

Intersections are another focus. Department engineers look at incident data for intersections around the state and routinely make changes to improve performance and safety. Adjustments to signal timing; use of larger traffic signals with enhanced lighting; additional signage and other efforts are used to lower incident rates.

Pedestrian safety is just as important as motorist safety. There is a heavy emphasis placed on intersections where pedestrian traffic is greatest. Research shows that less than five percent of pedestrian fatalities occur within marked crosswalks at intersections with traffic signals. Similarly, an improperly located crosswalk can create greater danger for pedestrians. So the Department is focused on adding appropriate pedestrian accommodations while also improving existing facilities.

Safety enhancements aren't as visible as new roads or bridges; more often than not, they go unnoticed. But they are an integral part of Georgia DOT's mission. And the staff who implements the safety program is among the many Department groups committed to providing a safe, seamless and sustainable transportation system that supports Georgia's economy and is sensitive to both its citizens and its environment.

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