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Multipronged anti-speeding effort succeeds in slowing traffic

BISHOPVILLE, Md. — A combination of enforcement, engineering and public outreach successfully reduced speeding during a demonstration project aimed at testing solutions to one of the most persistent road safety problems.

During the pilot project on a rural road in Maryland, average speeds fell 9 percent and the odds that a vehicle on the road was speeding dropped by three-quarters. The effects largely faded once the measures were discontinued.

The multipronged effort on MD 367, a two-lane road in Bishopville on Maryland's Eastern Shore, was [supported by a \\$100,000 grant](#) from the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHS), the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) and the National Road Safety Foundation (NRSF). The three organizations partnered to fund and evaluate comprehensive speed management pilot programs in one rural and one urban location. The urban project, planned for Virginia, is expected to begin later this year.

“Road deaths have been climbing, and more than a quarter of them are connected to speeding,” says IIHS President David Harkey. “As this study shows, a practical, comprehensive approach to the problem can slow drivers down.”

The effort in Bishopville, described in detail in a [report](#) by the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) Motor Vehicle Administration's Highway Safety Office, focused on a 2.4-mile section of the road that is a popular route for beachgoers in the summer months and is known to have a speeding problem. In July 2021, the lanes were narrowed by doubling the width of the painted edge and center lines to 10 inches to help slow traffic. In addition, speed feedback signs, which show drivers how fast they are going as they pass, were installed in two locations.

Around the same time, state highway officials began public outreach. Flyers highlighting the lane narrowing, planned speed enforcement and messaging were distributed to local residents and businesses. Signs announcing the enforcement and encouraging drivers to slow down went up along the corridor.

In August 2021, officials conducted four five-day waves of enhanced, high-visibility enforcement, which resulted in more than 120 speeding citations. The enforcement was accompanied by paid advertising that included social media messages, billboards and ads in a local weekly and on the navigation app Waze.

IIHS researchers found that average speeds fell 9 percent during the campaign. They also found a 78 percent reduction in the odds that a vehicle exceeded the speed limit by any amount and an 80 percent reduction in the odds of a driver going more than 10 mph over the limit.

“Together with our partners at the MDOT State Highway Administration, we were able to successfully bring together education, enforcement and engineering to make an impact on motorists' safety in Bishopville during the pilot program,” says MDOT Motor Vehicle Administrator Chrissy Nizer, who also serves as Governor Larry Hogan's Highway Safety



Representative. “We look forward to exploring additional opportunities to implement this comprehensive approach to reduce speeding in communities across Maryland.”

The project’s funders will also use the results to inform their future efforts. “This study clearly demonstrates why enforcement, engineering and education are very much needed,” says Michelle Anderson, NRSF director of operations. “They go hand in hand, and it’s our mission to promote effective programs such as this one.”

There was broad public awareness of the Bishopville program, and that was likely a key to its success. In surveys conducted as part of the study, drivers in the area were asked how likely it was that speeders would be stopped by the police. The percentage who said it was likely or very likely was much higher after the program began than before its launch (69 percent versus 47 percent). At the same time, the percentage of drivers in Bishopville and neighboring communities who said speeding was a major problem on MD 367 declined from 31 percent to 7 percent.

“Speeding is dangerous and deadly, and no one solution will solve the problem,” says GHSA Executive Director Jonathan Adkins. “Clearly, the Maryland project shows that a holistic approach can get drivers to slow down. When they do, it has a positive impact on their safety and that of everyone else on the road.”

The pilot project was temporary and so were the effects. The publicity and high-visibility enforcement efforts concluded at the end of August. In September, the speed feedback signs were removed. The corridor was marked with regular-width lane lines following a planned repaving, though MDOT is restoring the 10-inch lines after seeing the safety benefits documented by the study. Afterward, average speeds were just 2 percent lower than before the program began. And while the odds of speeding by any amount were 37 percent lower, the odds of a driver going more than 10 mph over the posted limit were actually 12 percent higher.

“The effects appear to have lingered for many drivers, but not the most aggressive speeders,” says IIHS Senior Research Transportation Engineer Wen Hu, the lead author of the study. “We believe efforts must be sustained in order to succeed over the long term and reduce speed-related crashes and fatalities.”

For more information from GHSA, go to ghsa.org

The Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA) is a nonprofit association representing the highway safety offices of states, territories, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. GHSA provides leadership and representation for the states and territories to improve traffic safety, influence national policy, enhance program management and promote best practices. Its members are appointed by their Governors to administer federal and state highway safety funds and implement state highway safety plans.

For more information from IIHS, go to iihs.org

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) is an independent, nonprofit scientific and educational organization dedicated to reducing the losses — deaths, injuries and property damage — from motor vehicle crashes. IIHS is wholly supported by auto insurers.

For more information from NRSF, go to nrsf.org

The National Road Safety Foundation, Inc. (NRSF) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit charitable organization that for 60 years has been dedicated to reducing crashes, deaths and injuries on our nation’s highways by promoting safe driving habits through greater public awareness. NRSF programs deal with distracted driving, speed and aggression, impaired driving, drowsy driving, driver proficiency and pedestrian safety. The Foundation also works with key youth advocacy groups and sponsors contests to engage teens in promoting safe driving to their peers and in their communities.

