

West Central Municipal Government Committee

Area Transportation Planning Sub-Committee

Presentation to the Special Committee on Traffic Safety

June 4, 2013

Box 129, Scott, SK S0K 4A0

Phone: (306) 247-2033

The West Central Municipal Government Committee (West Central) consists of representatives from approximately 85 urban and rural municipalities, health regions, school divisions and regional colleges in the west central part of Saskatchewan who meet on a monthly basis to discuss issues of mutual concern. The Area Transportation Planning Committee is a sub-committee of the West Central Municipal Government Committee to which representatives are elected on a yearly basis from the general membership of West Central.

An area of great concern to our entire membership is that of traffic safety and we respectfully submit several ideas on increasing traffic safety which will hopefully lead to a reduction in traffic accidents. We have chosen three areas to concentrate on as follows: police visibility and how we can increase this; the construction of passing lanes and cell phone usage.

We believe police visibility greatly curtails aggressive and unsafe driving. So how can we increase police visibility without greatly increasing the number of police officers? We continually hear there is too much book work and that, on average, a member spends half of his or her shift doing book work. They also do reports and research for the court system and it is our understanding these tasks are not the same in other provinces. We need our police officers on the road being visible as their presence slows the speeders, curtails the aggressive drivers and also reduces a variety of other crimes. A possible solution to alleviate these time constraints would be to hire office staff to free up time for the police officers to do their jobs. We believe the police officers, the highway traffic enforcement officers, municipal police and other policing agencies need to be out there working together in order to reduce highway accidents and fatalities.

It is our understanding one of the dominant factors causing traffic accidents is excessive speed. In our view, excessive speed is a direct result of driver frustration. On stretches of highway that have limited opportunities to pass given traffic volumes and topography, frustrated drivers will take more risks than normal, which often results in attempts to pass when it is not safe to do so. One example is the section of Highway No. 7 from Saskatoon to the Alberta border which has seen the amount of heavy truck traffic increase in recent years, and adding in the amount of traffic now using Highway No. 7 as the main route between Saskatoon and Calgary, there are not enough sections to pass slower-moving vehicles safely. This leads to frustration and line-ups of vehicles, driving bumper-to-bumper, which would be mitigated if passing lanes were installed. We have driven on various highways in Alberta with passing lanes and found their strategic location helped to alleviate the number of vehicles following one another, as traffic would pass once a passing lane was reached. As a Committee, we believe passing lanes would greatly reduce the amount of accidents on highways, as drivers would be more patient, knowing they only have a few more kilometers to follow a vehicle before the next passing lane. The cost to the taxpayer to install passing lanes is a small price to pay in exchange for the accidents that will be prevented.

Use of a cell phone while operating a motor vehicle is both a distraction and a safety issue. Whether simply talking on the cell phone or worse, texting or using the phone for other purposes, a driver's attention and eyes are not where they should be - which is on the road they are travelling on. The current fine for using a cell phone while operating a motor vehicle is \$280.00 which is a fairly large sum of money but may not be enough considering that the usage of these devices seems to be on the increase. Perhaps raising the fine amounts or making subsequent offences more expensive would help reduce the number of people who use their cell phones while operating a vehicle. Also, we feel educating young people is the way to get a foot hold in preventing motorists from even starting this bad

habit. Talking to students at schools and youth functions by involving individuals who have been in a situation where an accident has been caused by drivers using a cell phone could really hit home with the younger audience. The same idea has been in use for several years in campaigns targeting drinking and driving. Having well-known personalities use technology such as Twitter to get the message out would be a huge asset. Another possibility is increasing the demerit points applied on this type of offence. Motorists need to understand how their actions and decisions affect the environment around them - other motorists, pedestrians and numerous road hazards; and that care and attention are required every time they get behind the wheel.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide this presentation.



Stew Seversen, Chairman

West Central ATPC