

Safer Highways in All Facets
Written for Governor Earl Ray Tomblin's weekly blog

Under my directive, providing safety to the traveling public is the primary mission of the West Virginia Division of Highways (WVDOH). I am proud that separate agencies ally to create safer roads and bridges. WVDOH spearheads the charge under the Governor's Highway Safety Program with activities that you will readily recall, such as partnering with the law enforcement community on year round safety initiatives and activities that include DUI checkpoints and the Click it or Ticket seat belt campaign. These activities save countless lives and make our roadways safe for everyone.

My directive for creating safer driving conditions is in place for all of the obvious reasons, but imagine if you were one of the many hard-working men and women whose workplace is where others drive, and often at top speeds! Clever commercials have shown the perspective of office workers trying to go about their day with cars racing by. Each of us must imagine how it feels to be one of those workers, putting his or her life on the line to improve our highways and bridges every day. They contend with not just our fast moving cars, but with the elements of the weather and the inflexible highway that they must shape and repair. We owe it to them to slow down in their workplace and let them work with the same sense of safety that each of us has in our own work environments.

WVDOH will use nearly \$215 million to preserve and maintain over 37,000 miles of roadway in West Virginia. Only 4 other states are responsible for greater mileage. In addition, WVDOH has set aside nearly \$40 million patching potholes with an additional \$12 million coming from the winter road damage program after this year's merciless winter. Another \$136 million is budgeted toward WVDOH's resurfacing program. With continued cuts in federal and state dollars, we are fortunate to continue to keep funding at these levels. Moreover, we have not allowed those obstacles to keep us from taking care of lower priority secondary roads.

As a result of the ever increasing need to renovate our secondary road system, there has been a specific focus and separate allocation of \$15 million to go toward a Secondary Road Renovation Program. The intent of this program is to renovate those secondary roads with an average daily traffic (ADT) count of less than 500 vehicles that are in need of resurfacing but, due to limited funding, would not make the project list. So, all citizens in West Virginia have access to quality road conditions.

Safety is not just a condition at which government can throw money. It also requires us to be innovative and cutting edge. WVDOH employees work with concrete and pavement much the same way an artist works with paint or clay, but in this case the artist not only shapes the medium to will, but molds it in ways that make it safer for you and me. The Traffic Engineering department of WVDOH is widening the shoulders on 2 lane roads, creating safety edges which provide 30 degree slopes on the berm of the road, which eliminates what used to be a sudden drop off that caused vehicles to become unbalanced and drivers to overreact.

Before the driver can even get to the edge of the road, though, they will be safely alerted that they have veered to the edge of the highway by "rumble strips." Highway engineers call these "audible

warnings” but by whatever name they go by, you and I know that when our tires hit these strips, the agitation and rumbling sound alerts us that we have veered to the edge of the road, helping us even visible conditions might be less than ideal.

In addition WVDOH employs cable barriers, improved signage with retro reflective paint that illuminates more brightly than standard signs of the past and striping that has been widened from four inches to six inches.

Safety precautions are in place and initiatives are in action. So, when you are traveling throughout the Mountain State, please do so safely, using the new technology and giving heed to your fellow West Virginians working along the highway. A lot of effort goes into making our roads safer, but the best effort is that which comes from you.