



NEWS RELEASE

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WRONG WAY SIGNS LOWERED TO HELP DRIVERS SEE THE RIGHT PATH

Initiative designed to prevent crashes, save lives

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AUSTIN – Texas leads the nation in wrong-way crashes—crashes that occur when a driver heads the wrong direction on a roadway and into oncoming traffic. In the past two years, the city of Austin has seen 72 wrong-way crashes, six of them fatal. Less than half of these crashes occurred on state-maintained roadways.

In an effort to prevent drivers from entering a highway going the wrong way, the Texas Department of Transportation and Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority are lowering Wrong Way and/or Do Not Enter signs at the exit ramps of I-35 from Riverside Drive to US 183, as well as 183A Toll and 290 Toll roads. In all, 149 lowered signs will be installed. TxDOT and the Mobility Authority are also refreshing the raised pavement markings that display a red reflection when lit by headlights as an additional method to alert drivers they're traveling in the wrong direction.

"Since 2010, there have been 15 wrong-way crashes along this stretch of I-35," said Terry McCoy, TxDOT Austin District Engineer. "Because of that, we decided to focus on this area as the first phase of implementation. If it is successful, we will look to lower signs on other roads, as funding becomes available."

"Wrong-way driving has been an ongoing safety issue facing our community as long as roadways have existed," said Mike Heiligenstein, Executive Director of the Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority. "We are taking this critical first step and lowering all signs on the 183A and 290 Toll roads, and are committed to further implementation on all of our future roads."

Most wrong-way crashes happen at night or during early morning hours and in many cases the driver had been drinking.

"We conducted a research project studying the eye movements of intoxicated drivers to determine where they were looking and if they were noticing signs placed on the side of the road—similar to the signs that warn drivers not to enter a highway exit ramp the wrong way," said Melisa Finley, Texas A&M Transportation Institute Research Engineer. "What we found with intoxicated drivers is that they tend to get tunnel vision and often focus on the road in front of them, not highway signs."

With that in mind, TxDOT and the Mobility Authority are lowering the Wrong Way and/or Do Not Enter signs from seven feet to three feet, putting them eye-level for drivers.

In addition, TxDOT has performed research projects in San Antonio and in the DFW Metroplex regarding countermeasures aimed at deterring wrong-way driving incidences and the results have been positive.

“Other Texas cities that have lowered their warning signs have seen the number of wrong-way crashes drop,” McCoy said. “Based off those studies, we can now take these new methods into consideration in hopes they reduce the risk of crashes in Austin. But, it’s important to remember that drivers must also make responsible decisions when driving, including not engaging in dangerous acts like drinking and driving.”

Safety experts say avoiding a wrong-way crash is difficult because it is so unexpected for motorists to encounter another vehicle headed the wrong direction. They suggest being as alert as possible to your surroundings. It may also help to stay out of the fast lane of traffic.

If you do see a vehicle coming your way, slow down, get off the highway, and call 9-1-1 to report the wrong-way driver.

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