

***FIRST
NATIONAL FORUM
ON TRAFFIC
RECORDS
SYSTEMS***

NOVEMBER 12-14, 1974

FORUM PROCEEDINGS

NATIONAL FORUM

ON

TRAFFIC RECORDS SYSTEMS

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National Safety Council

In Cooperation With

American Association of
Motor Vehicle Administrators

National Conference of Governors
Highway Safety Representatives

Transportation Research Board's
Traffic Records Committee

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INTRODUCTIONS

A. Dewey Jordan, Chairman
Traffic Records Committee
National Safety Council

The Traffic Records Committee of the National Safety Council is pleased to present the first National Forum on Traffic Records Systems. We are proud to have the assistance in this endeavor of the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators, the Transportation Research Boards Traffic Records Committee, and the Governors Highway Safety Representatives.

The objective of the Forum is to bring together working professionals in the development and use of traffic records systems for the purpose of hearing presentations and exchanging information. Our Forum will include such subjects as:

- o The Administration and management of traffic records systems
- o Data analysis reports
- o Uses and Users of traffic records systems
- o Intergovernmental and interstate data exchange
- o Special reports of Traffic Records Committees and National organizations

We are not strangers to one another and certainly the topics which we will address here are not new to you. What is new is that we have brought together our several organizations to deal with these problems in a manner which will enable us to share our findings and achieve a unified approach.

And now I would like to introduce Mr. Bill Franey, Deputy Executive Director of the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators, who will be presiding for the morning session.

William H. Franey, Assistant Executive Director of the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators, presided for the introductions, welcome, forum address and traffic records systems special reports.

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Wilma Lockhart, Executive Director of the Louisiana Highway Safety Commission, welcomed the participants to the State of Louisiana and the City of New Orleans.

Dr. James B. Gregory, Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

THE IMPACT OF TRAFFIC RECORDS SYSTEMS

I appreciate being asked to open the first National Forum on Traffic Records Systems, sponsored by the Traffic Records Committee of the National Safety Council. As I look around this room I see many familiar faces associated with the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators, the Governors Highway Safety Representatives, the Transportation Research Board, some key legislators, plus others including appropriate staff members of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. I would say that I am in good company and the topic to be taken up in this Forum is both timely and vital from a number of aspects. I only wish I shared the level of technical expertise and experience evidenced by this assembly. One thing I do share, at least at times: the frustration of needing vital data which is not easily available by which to get my job done.

A good traffic records system is not only a bottom-line item: It's the bottom line. Quoting from our highway safety program manual:

"The purpose of Traffic Records is to assure that appropriate data on drivers, motor vehicles, highways, and motor vehicle traffic accidents is gathered, entered into the system in such a manner that it is retrievable, and is used for analysis in planning, management and evaluation of highway safety programs to further the goals of crash, injury and death reduction."

Looking at it another way, traffic records should tell us where we are and point the optimum path to our goals; thus they have a planning function. They should generate and move programs; so they have an operations function. And they should tell us whether or not we have reached our destination and, if not, by how much; therefore, they have an evaluation function.

It is our policy to support the development within each State of a traffic records system that meets State and local government needs for planning, operation, and management of highway traffic safety programs. The actual design and implementation of the records system are performed by the individual State or its political subdivisions.

However, we do encourage and want to work with you toward effective data standardization at the local, State, and national level. In 1973, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) published a Design Manual for State Traffic Records Systems which was created in response to the need for, and significant benefits to be derived from, improved standardization. Most importantly, the Manual outlines the data content to support the development and implementation of highway traffic safety programs. All aspects of the development of an integrated statewide traffic records system are addressed in the Manual, including systems development, data needs of individual State and local government organizations, information exchange, and recommended data analysis and identification of safety problems and solutions.

As new concepts in the organization and employment of traffic records data are developed, or present ideas are modified, NHTSA plans to update the Design Manual to reflect these developments. As additional recognized national data standards are developed, the Manual will be revised to accommodate these changes.

Two American National Standards Institute active committees will impact future changes in the Manual. These are D16.1 Manual on Classification of Motor Vehicle Traffic Accidents, sponsored by the National Safety Council; and D20 States' Model Motorist Data Base, sponsored by the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators.

Traffic records are critical to the success of all aspects of traffic safety. Their effectiveness depends to a large degree on the quality and use of the traffic records systems by States and communities. Some of the many support functions they provide are:

- o Statewide traffic safety programs management through traffic records data analysis, problem identification, and program planning, management and evaluation.
- o Identification of problem drivers for corrective action by administration and enforcement officials. This is especially significant for the identification of problem drinking drivers.
- o Rapid identification of drivers whose licenses have been denied or withdrawn as an aid to licensing control programs and enforcement, administration, and judicial actions.
- o Provide readily available data on driver convictions, suspensions, and previous license restrictions for traffic court judges prior to sentencing or referral to driver improvement programs.
- o Identification of high-accident or potential high-accident locations for corrective action by highway engineering agencies.
- o Identification of high-accident or potential high-accident locations for Selective Traffic Enforcement Programs.
- o Analysis of traffic arrest and accident locations so police administrators can make effective and intelligent use of their manpower and facilities.

Most records systems in States and communities were originally created out of vital operational needs rather than strictly the needs of highway safety. Operational programs may have little direct safety benefit, but they do have the potential for a tremendous indirect impact on safety. State traffic records designed for operational programs are often geared to a case-by-case storage and retrieval which meets the general needs of driver licensing, vehicle registration and traffic law enforcement, and, therefore, are not necessarily suited to analyze the entire highway safety situation for problem identification.

Realizing that State files were built to satisfy operational needs, we know that:

1. Many separate systems have often been built within individual States.

2. Each of these systems costs a good deal to operate and maintain. This results in duplicated data being maintained along with duplicated costs.
3. Exchanges attempted between most systems within a given State are usually difficult, costly, and usually not timely.

We also have to say that a lot of money has gone into the upgrading of the States' systems. Now is the time to redirect some of the current efforts and expenditures to achieve the improvements that we all know are needed and which should result from the monies spent.

In the area of file usage, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, through our Office of Statistics and Analysis, is working in three major areas of data collection.

The first of these is the Fatal Accident Reporting Systems (FARS), which is a redesign and upgrading of the Fatality Analysis File. The FARS has information on all fatal accidents. It is obtained from the State accident report forms, highway departments, vehicle registration files, driver licensing files and the State vital statistics files.

The second area is that of Multidisciplinary Accident Investigation (MDAI). The data are collected by MDAI Teams that make scientific, in-depth studies of specific accidents. These teams are composed of a mix of trained professionals, so that the data collected are both reliable and complete. In the future, the accidents to be investigated will be selected according to a National Sampling Strategy and will thus be representative of the National Accident Environment.

The third area is the National Accident Reporting System (NARS). The NARS will be composed of a sample of all non-fatal accidents and will be representative of the National Accident Environment. It will be obtained in much the same fashion as the data for the FARS, and will contain similar information.

We are also in the final stages of a feasibility study on a National Center for Statistical Analysis of Highway Operations. The National

Center would be responsible for acquiring, standardizing, retrieving, and producing reports and analysis of accident and other related data.

The management of a comprehensive and effective national highway traffic safety program requires the acquisition and analysis of data related to all important aspects of motor vehicle transportation system at all levels.

Although numerous files have been established to attempt to satisfy specific, individual needs, I think it is fair to say that no system exists to coordinate, compile, analyze and distill the needed data into useful information or to avoid duplication of effort and the proliferation of unusable files. It has become apparent that a total systems approach is needed to bring together data requirements contained in the various reporting systems previously established.

In response to the needs described, a computerized Traffic Safety Programs/Management Information System (TSP/MIS) is being developed which will be responsive to all levels of program management concerned with state and community highway safety programs.

Currently an analysis of the existing Federal and State traffic safety reporting requirements is being undertaken. From this effort, development of a data dictionary and design of a comprehensive system to meet the needs of the Office of Traffic Safety Programs will follow. In addition, the existing Program Information Reporting System will be implemented as the first component of the MIS. Once this component is installed, we will begin working on the other systems components which consist of the Annual Work Program, the Comprehensive Plan, legislative status, and program analysis and evaluation.

Many of the areas I have briefly gone into this morning will be expanded upon by subsequent Forum participants, including your Chairman, Dewey Jordan, and Marie Eldridge of NHTSA, as well as by the participants in the panel discussion which immediately follows these remarks.

I also want to mention that one other NHTSA member on your Forum program is Brian Connell, Chief of the National Driver Register. The NDR is set up to help you achieve bottom line results, too. I urge you to contribute to it, and to use it.

I want to touch on another matter which is very recent in development, so much so that we are currently assessing its impact, both short and long range.

As you know, the Congress recently passed, and President Ford on October 27 signed into law a bill which contains some significant changes in the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966. One of these changes will require manufacturers to identify and notify, whenever a safety defect is determined to exist, not merely those owners known to the manufacturer through warranty registration, but every owner registered in any State as the owner of any vehicle containing the defect. This new law will require the recall of those vehicles and it will require the manufacturer to correct the defect free of cost to the owner.

This single change thrusts upon each State's record-keeping facility a new role. Each State will be called upon to furnish from manufacturer defect/vehicle identification number listings a matched list of drivers who own those vehicles. No other up-to-date source of such information exists.

This expanded, recall-and-remedy provision is significant, and its success will hinge upon the accuracy, adequacy, and efficiency of the record-keeping program in each State.

I have one other comment before I close. We as a society have shown we can impact the bottom line favorably. Not only are injury and fatality rates going down, but so are the actual year-to-year month-to-month numbers. The national 55 mph speed concept is saving fuel and it is saving lives. This effort plus our continuing specific safety programs which are paying off in terms of better drivers, a better driving environment, and safer cars add up to today's improved bottom line.

If we are to communicate with each other sensibly and rapidly in the future about this bottom line and the changes in it we are all working for we need the common and consistent language we're all here to talk about.

Thank you.

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

Each organization involved in conducting the National Forum on Traffic Records Systems was represented on a panel to respond to Dr. Gregory's forum address and to question him regarding aspects of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's traffic records program.

Fortunately, the chief administrator of each organization participated in the panel discussions, including:

Vincent L. Tofany, President
National Safety Council

William N. Carey, Jr., Executive Director
Transportation Research Board

Noel C. Bufe, Past Chairman
National Conference of Governors
Highway Safety Representatives

Richard E. McLaughlin, President
American Association of
Motor Vehicle Administrators