

**2007 Herman Goldstein Award for
Excellence in Problem Oriented Policing**



State Route 241 Crossroads Project

Table of Contents

Summary	1
Scanning	3
Maps	4
Analysis	5
Response	6
Assessment	8
Agency Information	9

Summary

★ Project Title ★

State Route 241 Crossroads Project

The State Route 241 Crossroads Project is an outstanding example of a small but very effective application of Problem Oriented Policing, undertaken at the grass-roots level to mitigate a local public safety problem. It's also an outstanding example of local officials taking ownership of a problem and making a change in the community where they work and live. Sergeant Tom Foster of the Washington State Patrol (WSP) initiated this project in response to a rash of collisions occurring at three key intersections along a one-mile stretch of state highway in south central Washington State. Troopers worked with local stakeholders to identify needed changes in engineering, education, and enforcement. The pattern of collisions was virtually eliminated in one year.

Scanning

Between January 2004 and June 2005, troopers assigned to the WSP's Sunnyside Autonomous Patrol Area (APA) responded to 16 collisions within 18 months occurring at three intersections within a one-mile section of State Route 241 (SR 241) near Sunnyside. Sergeant Foster formed a partnership with local law enforcement and transportation officials.

Analysis

Troopers analyzed collision reports from each of the 16 collisions and discovered some patterns in causations. Eight collisions involved stop sign violations, seven involved failure to yield the right of way, and one involved a centerline violation.

These collisions resulted in nine injuries and represented 3% of the total number of collisions investigated in the APA.

Sergeant Foster enlisted cooperation from the Washington State Department of Transportation, Yakima County Sheriff's Office, and Yakima County Public Services.

Response

Stakeholder response to the collision problem on SR 241 consisted of roadway engineering changes and increased motorist education through roadside enforcement.

Engineering changes included reducing the speed limit on SR 241 from 55 to 50 mph, larger STOP signs at all three intersections, and rumble strips on the county roads on approaches to SR 241.

Summary (continued)

Law enforcement conducted emphasis patrols beginning with verbal warnings immediately after the reduced speed limit took effect. Later, enforcement was increased and citations were issued.

Assessment

Collisions dropped from 16 in 18 months, to one in 12 months. This translates to .88 collisions per month before the project, falling to .08 collisions afterward, a reduction of 90.9%.

Scanning

Washington State Patrol District 3 is located in southeast Washington and is commanded by Captain Shawn Berry out of the Yakima District Office. The Sunnyside Autonomous Patrol Area (APA), recently re-designated as the Grandview APA after moving to a new office facility, lies between Yakima and the Tri-Cities of Richland, Kennewick, and Pasco. The seven troopers assigned to the APA cover 156 miles of state and interstate highways, which travel through a largely agricultural area of south-central Washington State.

State Route 241 is a two-lane secondary state highway originating in the city of Sunnyside in south-central Washington. (See maps on page four.) The highway runs along the east side of the city and extends north for 25 miles, terminating at State Route 24, feeding traffic east toward the Hanford Nuclear Reservation or north into the Columbia Basin area. Of particular interest are three intersections within a one-mile segment of SR 241: Factory, East Edison, and Sheller. Between January 2004 and June 2005, troopers responded to 16 collisions at these intersections. The location-specific nature of this problem made it ideally suited for application of the POPS problem-solving methodology.

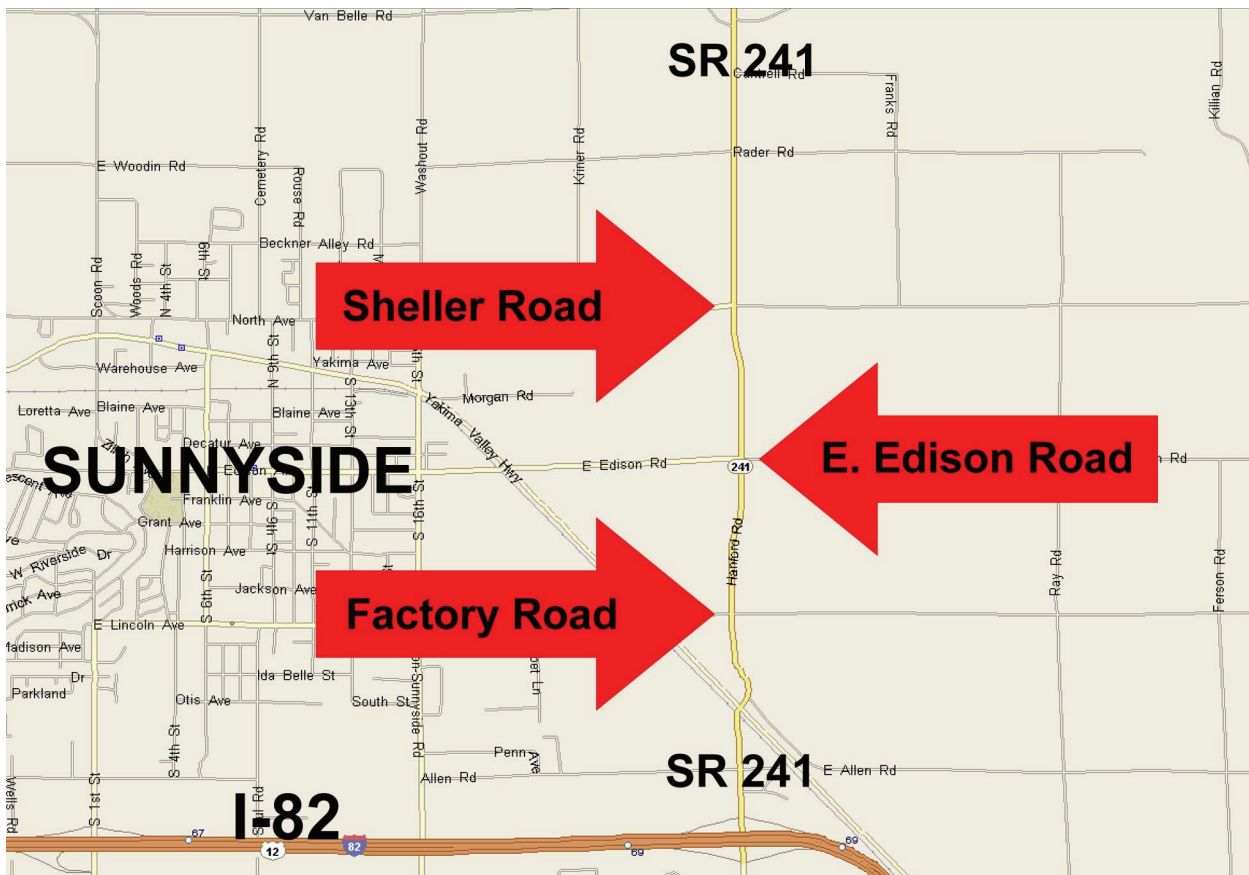
Sergeant Foster began to identify stakeholders. His initial list contained most of the usual stakeholders seen in any traffic safety project: local agencies, insurance companies, the Washington Traffic Safety Commission, etc. Recognizing that he was not facing a major epidemic of traffic collisions, but rather a very concentrated and location-specific traffic problem, he chose to focus on a core group of resources. His first meeting was with the Yakima County Sheriff's Office and Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT). The Sheriff's Office invited the Yakima County Public Services (county roads).

Maps



The Grandview APA

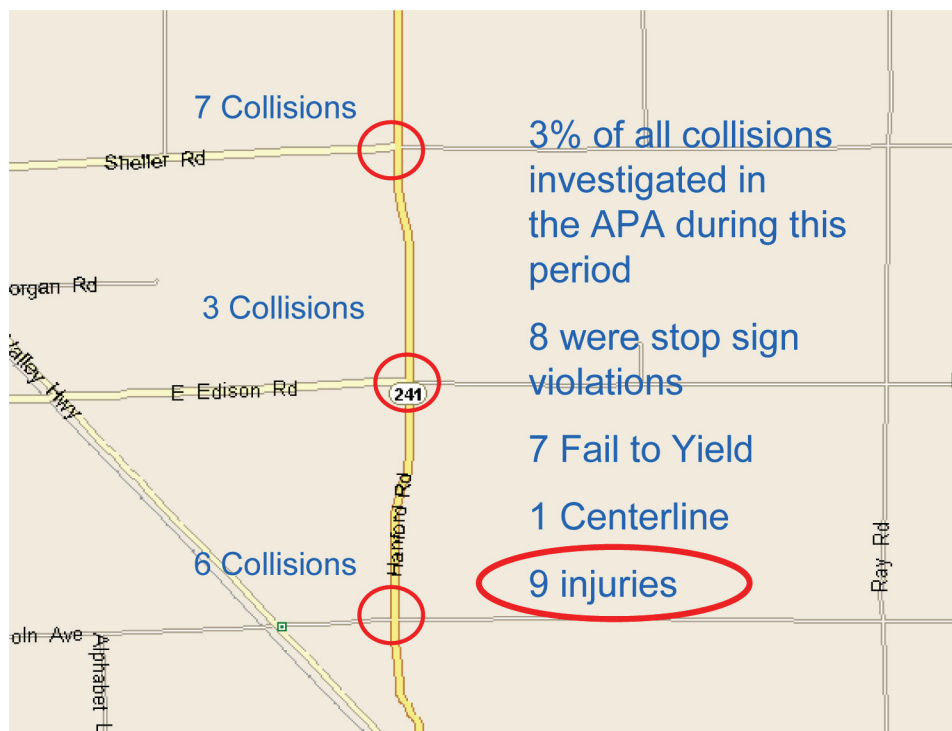
The area of Sunnyside and SR 241 shown in the map below is bounded by the red box.



SR 241 in Sunnyside with the problem intersections identified.

Analysis

The next step was to establish a statistical baseline. Troopers analyzed Police Traffic Collision Reports from 16 crashes that occurred within an 18-month period. These collisions represented 3% of the total collisions investigated in the Autonomous Patrol Area (APA) and were located at three intersections along a one-mile section of SR 241. Seven collisions occurred at Sheller Road, three at Edison Road, and six at Factory Road. Eight collisions involved stop sign violations, seven involved failure to yield the right of way, and one involved crossing the centerline. Nine injuries resulted. On average, there were .88 collisions per month. During the months of May, June and July, this increased to 2.3 collisions per month. The area is largely agricultural, and visibility at these intersections during the growing season is restricted by crops.



Eliminating the collisions occurring at these three intersections would constitute a 3% reduction in collisions in the APA, which is great progress toward meeting Goal #1 of the WSP Field Operations Bureau Strategic Plan: Reduce fatality and injury collisions on Interstate and State Routes by 4%.

Response

Response strategies included the “Three E’s” so commonly involved in traffic safety problem solving: Engineering, Education, and Enforcement.

Engineering

After review and discussion of collision data by stakeholders, the WSDOT lowered the posted speed limit on this section of highway from 55 mph to 50 mph. The new speed limit signs were highlighted with orange flags when initially installed. In addition, the 36-inch STOP signs at the three intersections were replaced with high-profile 48-inch STOP signs.



A 36-inch stop sign.



Replacement 48-inch stop sign.

Yakima County Public Services also installed “rumble strips” and appropriate advance warning signs on the approaches to SR 241 at the three intersections involved in the project. (See photos below.)



Response (continued)

Education and Enforcement

The law enforcement response was simple, straightforward, and utilized enforcement as an educational tool. The WSP, Yakima County Sheriff's Office, and Sunnyside Police Department provided focused enforcement of the newly reduced speed limit on SR 241. A lot of warnings were given during the first few months after the speed limit was changed. This constituted the educational phase for the public and allowed motorists to adjust to the new speed limit and gave law enforcement an opportunity to educate them on the reasons behind the change. As time passed, the level of enforcement increased.

Assessment

Sergeant Foster and his detachment members waited patiently from July 2005 to June 2006, then took an assessment of the previous 12 months. There had been only ONE collision at any of the three intersections during the assessment period. That one collision equates to .08 collisions per month during our response phase, compared to .88 before the project. This is a reduction of 90.9%. Before the project there were 2.3 collisions per month during the months of May, June and July. During the assessment period, there were NO collisions during those three months.

Agency and Officer Information

This problem solving initiative was adopted by Sergeant Foster and the troopers assigned to the Sunnyside Detachment and is one of approximately 50 such POPS projects in progress within the WSP.

All WSP officers receive basic POPS training. Seventy-two carefully selected POPS troopers received advanced training in the late 1990's and became the agents of change as POPS became a norm within the agency. For many years, these troopers represented the face of POPS in the WSP. Now as the final 18 positions are being phased out, the philosophy is fully integrated and has become the way we do business.

The concepts of problem solving and partnerships have been integrated into virtually every system internal to the WSP, including cadet basic training, supervisor and mid-level manager training, the promotional process, and the job performance appraisal process. Project coordinators receive no monetary or promotional incentive to initiate a POPS project. Officers are invited to attend the annual WSP POPS Forum to observe presentations on past years' exemplary projects. In addition, the WSP POPS Training Guide is available online as a problem-solving resource to every WSP employee. This project was completed using existing personnel and financial resources.

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