

**2011 Herman Goldstein Award Submission
for
Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing**

**Washington State Patrol
Skagit Community
Connection
Project Detail**



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SKAGIT COMMUNITY CONNECTION

SUMMARY

Autonomous Patrol Area (APA) 31 encompasses all of Skagit County and parts of Whatcom and Chelan Counties. There are two detachments assigned to the APA, consisting of 14 troopers and two sergeants. A majority of the APA is made up of rural highways and farming communities. There is a major interstate (I-5) and seven state routes (9, 11, 20, 530, 534, 536, & 538). There is a major mountain pass (Cascade Pass) located on SR-20 between Winthrop and Sedro Woolley, connecting Western Washington with Eastern Washington. This is one of the major tourism routes in Washington State, especially for motorcycle traffic. There are two major annual events in APA 31. The first is the Tulip Festival, which lasts throughout the month of April. This event creates heavy congestion throughout the southwest portion of the APA and around the city of Mount Vernon. The other major event, the Oyster Run, occurring in the last weekend of September, is a major motorcycle rally in Washington State, impacting all of APA 31 as well as the surrounding counties.

The Skagit Community Connection (SCC) started in January 2009 in response to a long term but stable number of fatality collisions in Skagit County. APA 31 led State Patrol District 7 (Snohomish, Skagit, Island, and Whatcom Counties) for the previous three years (2006-2008) in the total number of fatal collisions (45) as well as fatalities (48) resulting from those collisions. During the analysis phase of the project, it was discovered that there were several common violations contributing to these fatal collisions; 51% of all the collisions were a result of speed and/or impaired motorists and the other 49% were caused by lane travel violations, following too closely, wrong way vehicles, etc. Additionally, 25% of the fatal collisions involved motorcycles, 32% of the fatalities were unbelted, and nearly one-third of the collisions occurred during the late-summer months of August and September.

The greatest measure of success for this project was the outcome and current trend for fatal collisions.

- 2009:
 - 26% decrease
- 2010:
 - 46% decrease
 - 5 of the 8 state highways had no fatal collisions
- 2010/2011:
 - 1 fatal collision since August 17, 2010
 - 0 fatal collisions on a state route or interstate in last eight months
 - 0 fatal collisions in APA 31 in 2011

DESCRIPTION

Scanning

There are two specific issues that prompted this Problem Oriented Policing (POP) project. The first issue is the most serious. Skagit County was leading District 7 with 45 fatal crashes resulting in 48 fatalities over a three-year period (2006 – 2008); 2008 was one of the worst years with 18 fatalities. This high yet stable number of fatal collisions was alarming. We quickly learned that our approach to the problem was myopic and ineffective. Over the previous three years, the troopers in Skagit County were concentrating their efforts on enforcement only, arresting 2,684 impaired drivers (DUIs), citing 7,654 unrestrained motorists, and citing 23,537 speeders, but this approach was just not working. We had to develop a new strategy, employing more than just an enforcement tactic; we had to be creative and holistic in our approach.

The second issue was a very simple but poignant question posed at a lieutenant's exam in 2008: "What are you doing as a leader to get your employees to believe in Target Zero?" An action plan had to be developed that would empower troopers, providing them the autonomy to implement creative strategies, with the goal of quickly and dramatically impacting fatal collisions. Ultimately, the community and troopers were going to be the answer to our problem.

Washington's Strategic Highway Safety Plan-Target Zero calls for the reduction of highway deaths to zero by the year 2030. The entire plan can be found at www.targetzero.com. Enforcement is one of four equal strategies of Target Zero, along with engineering, education, and emergency medical services. Under Target Zero, troopers will focus on these violations, proven to cause fatal or serious injury collisions:

- Speeding
- Driving While Impaired
- Failure to Wear a Seat Belt

These are the "low hanging fruit" of traffic safety. Violators are easy to spot, and a majority of highway deaths have one of these violations as a contributing factor. (While the failure to wear a seat belt does not cause collisions, it certainly contributes to deaths in collisions that would have otherwise been survivable.)

Analysis

The Washington State Patrol investigates all serious injury and fatality collisions in APA 31, which encompasses all of Skagit County and parts of Whatcom and Chelan County. APA 31 held the unfortunate distinction as the leader in District 7 in the total number of fatal collisions (Fig. 1) as well as the total number of fatalities involved in those collisions (Fig. 2).

Further analysis revealed some causal factors that would become the focus of a plan to support Target Zero and guide any future enforcement and/or educational efforts. Impaired drivers were present in 22% of all fatal collisions from 2006 through 2008. Speed was a factor in 28% of all the fatal collisions over the same three-year period. Additionally, these two violations combined were factors in 51% of all fatal collisions. This fact reinforces "Priority One: Impaired Driving and Speed" of the Target Zero plan and would prove to be a critical element in the future success of this project. Unrestrained motorists were a factor in 28% of all fatal collisions and 27% of all fatalities. Fatality

collisions involving a motorcycle accounted for 20% of all fatal collisions over this three-year period (Fig. 3).

The next phase of the analysis concentrated on the time of day, day of the week, and month. The time of day was selected based on the traditional hours of operation and concentrated work efforts for specific types of violations in APA 31 (Fig. 4). During the analysis we learned that a person was more likely to be involved in a fatal collision in APA 31 during daylight hours; of the 45 fatal collisions, 20 (40%) occurred from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. (The least likely time to be involved in a fatal collision in APA 31 over the three-year period was from 12:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m., during which time 20% of fatal collisions occurred.) However, the promising trend, even for this category, was downward, with five fatal collisions in 2006 and two in 2008. The startling figure was that of the nine fatal collisions that occurred during this time of the day, only one involved driver impairment.

When evaluating day-of-the-week fatality frequency from 2006 through 2008, there was only one day that was well above the mean for fatal collisions, Thursday, with 11 (24% of all fatal collisions) (Fig. 5). Conversely, Friday had the fewest number of fatal collisions at four (8%). However, when reviewing the fatal collisions by day-of-the-week on a yearly basis, the trend was not consistent. In 2006 there were no fatal collisions on Friday or Saturday; 75% of all fatal collisions occurred between Monday and Thursday. In 2007 this trend shifted to weekends. Friday and Saturday accounted for 58% of all fatal collisions in APA 31 and no fatal collisions occurred on Sunday. In 2008 this trend shifted back to weekdays, with 66% of all fatal collisions occurring between Monday and Thursday. Anecdotally, early indications inferred that traffic volume may be a factor in the total number of fatal collisions occurring in APA 31.

Time of year played a critical role in the number of fatality collisions (Fig. 6) and would eventually guide enforcement strategies, educational opportunities, and strategic planning with available Washington Traffic Safety Commission (WTSC) overtime funding and WTSC Corridor funding. August 2008 was the peak month for fatality collisions, with six. From 2006 through 2008, August proved to be the most deadly, accounting for 17% of all the fatal collisions. When combining all summer months (June through August), which accounts for 25% of the calendar year, the total number of fatal collisions was 17. This is 37% of all fatal collisions over the three-year time span. The least deadly months proved to be March and April, each experiencing one fatal collision from 2006 through 2008. The least deadly time period occurs March through May. Again, this accounts for 25% of the calendar year; however, there were a total of four fatal collisions from 2006 through 2008, or 8% of all fatal collisions. Time-of-the-year trends proved to be critical information, revealing that fatality collisions coincided with tourism and vacation travel.

Finally, fatal collisions by highway type were analyzed (Fig. 7).

- Interstate 5 was the least deadly highway with three fatal collisions from 2006 through 2008 and no fatal collisions in 2007 or 2008. The three fatal collisions represent 6% of all fatal collisions from 2006 through 2008. However, in 2006, 20% of all fatal collisions were on Interstate 5.
- The state routes experienced 22, or 48%, of all fatal collisions from 2006 through 2008.

- County-maintained roads had a total of 20 fatal collisions, or 44% of all fatal collisions during this period.

The state and interstate route systems are the Washington State Patrol's primary responsibilities. When reporting to Washington State's Governor at the Government Management Accountability and Performance (GMAP) meeting, one performance measure is the reduction in the total number of fatal collisions that occur on state and interstate routes. Fig. 8 represents the total number of fatal collisions by state and interstate routes in APA 31 from 2006 through 2008. During this period there were a total of 25 fatal collisions. The road that proved to be the most deadly for this road type from 2006 through 2008 was SR-20, experiencing 9 fatal collisions over three years, or 36% of all fatal collisions on a state or interstate route. SR 20 is the longest state highway in APA 31, stretching from Anacortes to Winthrop and totaling approximately 105 miles of geographic responsibility. Conversely, SR-534 and SR-538 are the least deadly state highways in APA 31, both experiencing zero fatal collisions over the study period. SR 538 is the shortest state route in APA 31, with approximately three miles of geographic responsibility. SR 538 connects SR-9 with I-5 and a majority of this roadway is in the city limits of Mount Vernon. SR 534 is the third shortest state route in APA 31 (5 miles) and connects SR-9 with I-5. This roadway is exclusively in Skagit County but does have one of the few school zones on a state route in APA 31.

During the three problem years (2006 – 2008) much of the effort in APA 31 targeted the fatality collision problem through enforcement. During these three years, enforcement of impaired driving, speed, occupant restraints, and aggressive driving laws remained stable or increased incrementally. These violations are the primary focus of Target Zero, the WSP Strategic Plan, and the District 7 Operational Plan.

From 2006 to 2007:

- Impaired driving arrests increased from 780 to 923.
- Speed stops increased from 11,145 to 12,780.
- Seat belt contacts increased from 1,972 to 3,088.
- Aggressive driver contacts increased from 1,352 to 2,117.

Fig. 9 illustrates these increases. At first glance, this appeared to have an immediate impact on the total number of fatal collisions, dropping from 15 fatal collisions in 2006 to 12 fatal collisions in 2007.

The following year did not have the same results. DUI arrests increased for the third year in a row, from 923 in 2007 to 981 in 2008. Aggressive driver contacts also increased for the third year, from 2,117 in 2007 to 2,461 in 2008. However, speed contacts decreased from 12,780 in 2007 to 11,142 in 2008. Seat belt contacts also decreased, from a three-year high in 2007 of 3,088 to 2,803 in 2008. It is unclear how these mixed results impacted fatal collisions, but APA 31 experienced a three-year high in total fatal collisions, rising from 12 in 2007 to 18 in 2008.

These tragedies demonstrated our current approach was too narrowly focused and unsuccessful. It required immediate action to drastically impact the rising fatal collisions. Fatal collisions were spread throughout the APA. There was not one specific trend that could be targeted to reduce and/or eliminate the fatal collision problem. Attention to one specific roadway was not going to cause the

fatal problem to go away. There was not one specific time of the day, day of the week, or month of the year that we could exclusively target. The response was going to have to be creative and holistic; it had to include all priorities of the Target Zero plan. Previous POP projects demonstrated that community involvement and education are valuable and effective tools for reducing and/or eliminating fatal collisions. This element was absent from 2006 through 2008.

The Washington State Patrol prides itself on being an unbiased police agency. Based on this, we chose not to incorporate age, gender, ethnicity, or race in the analysis of fatal collisions. Although this information would provide some intriguing demographic information, we did not want this information to influence any future enforcement strategies.

Response

After reviewing three years of data and conducting numerous detachment meetings, we developed a strategy that we believed would immediately impact the fatal collision problem and would develop an increased level of trust with the community through interaction, information gathering, and education. A plan was implemented for APA 31's fourteen troopers to adopt sections of state routes and the interstate, as well as portions of county roads. Initially, this project was named "Adopt-a-Highway" but since we did not want to be confused with a Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) litter pickup project, it was later renamed the "Skagit Community Connection" (SCC).

This project required each trooper to conduct a three-step process (similar to the first three steps of the SARA model): information gathering, strategic planning, and response. Starting in January 2009, each trooper was assigned a geographic area of responsibility (Fig. 10) and would be referred to as a "project manager." The conditions set on the assigned areas of responsibility were:

1. The project manager could not reside in his/her area of responsibility; and
2. The project manager could not be assigned an area that he/she traditionally patrolled.

These conditions provided the greatest opportunity for being exposed as a project manager to dual zones and it provided the greatest opportunity for previously unidentified problems to be recognized by a new set of eyes.

Each project manager was given 30 days to complete an analysis of any problems that could lead to fatal collisions within their assigned areas and any issue that the public viewed as a problem. There were no restrictions placed on the types of problems that could be addressed (e.g., roadway design, enforcement issues, educational issues, etc.). There was a very specific expectation that the project managers would contact some residents, businesses, and government offices within their assigned areas of responsibility. At the end of the 30 days, project managers had to meet with their supervisors to discuss the problems occurring in their areas of responsibility.

After the meetings, project managers had 14 days to complete area operational plans. Project managers were encouraged to include community involvement, education, enforcement, and engineering in their operational plans. At the conclusion of this phase, the plans were activated with predetermined timelines for follow-up and project adjustments.

For logistical purposes, there were a few things that had to be implemented to aid in the process of gathering information, disseminating project information, and providing community access to the project managers. As an agency, we already had the Time and Activity System (TAS), which is a comprehensive tracking system to record enforcement contacts and collision investigation efforts on state and interstate routes. However, in order to gather accurate information about enforcement strategies and collision investigation by the WSP on county roads, APA 31 developed county road sectional codes (Fig. 11 & 11A). These would be recorded daily in the same manner all activity is recorded on state routes and the interstate.

The next step was to develop and distribute a tri-fold brochure (Fig. 12). The interior portion of the brochure describes the Skagit Community Connection project at a glance, defines how the project will work, why the project is needed, and how the community can help. It provides a link to the address of the WSP POP web page and direct contacts for the Skagit County supervisors. This led to the final staging piece: posting the project on the POP web page to include the geographic assignments, the project managers' names, and their e-mail addresses. This would enable the public to contact the project managers directly.

Like any other successful corporation, government agency, or project, the final step was to develop a mission statement and to establish clear, measurable goals.

The mission of the SCC is to have APA 31 troopers invest in the community through Problem Oriented Policing by adopting sections of Skagit County bordered by the interstate and/or state routes.

The goal was to reduce or eliminate fatal and serious injury collisions within Skagit County through:

- Trooper ownership and community involvement within geographic regions,
- Developing relationships, partners, and stakeholders,
- 100% integration of the POP philosophy within Skagit County.

There were many successful area projects within the SCC, too many to detail. However, there are a few that are worth mentioning, which will provide a brief summary of the overall success of the SCC.

The first outlines the success of community-voiced concerns and how immediate intervention can foster positive relationships. We had a local businessman who voiced concerns to Trooper Mark Francis that motorists were cutting through his parking lot to bypass a controlled intersection. This exposed his employees to being struck by impatient and irresponsible motorists. Trooper Francis immediately adjusted his work schedule to address the problem. While targeting the problem, he contacted eight violators cutting through the parking lot and arrested one impaired driver. He provided follow-up to the business owner and enlisted the assistance of the WSDOT to make engineering changes, including curbing and intersection redesign, to eliminate the problem.

During this two-year project there were three mock DUI/victim panels organized in three different areas of responsibility: Burlington Edison High School, Sedro Woolley High School, and Anacortes High School. These were strategically presented before high school proms. The success of these mock DUIs resulted in no collisions or alcohol-related incidents from any student who attended the mock DUI presentations.

One trooper provided a public presentation about the SCC at the Skagit County Council to three council members, which became available for public viewing on a local television network and online. Commissioner Ken Dahlstedt stated, “These partnerships and what you do to protect people is more significant than writing just a few tickets; this gives the opportunity to have that interaction with the community.”

During this project there was a 24-hour emphasis patrol combined with a safety fair just outside the town of Sedro Woolley (Figs. 13 & 13A). The partnerships at this safety fair/emphasis patrol included the WSP Missing Persons Unit, the Mobile Impaired Driving Unit (MIDU), Safe Kids, WSDOT, the Sedro Woolley and Mount Vernon Police Departments, the Skagit County Sheriff’s Department, and the 9 to 5 Corridor Coalition. The safety fair provided an avenue for the public to get information and voice concerns about their community. For the emphasis patrol, law enforcement targeted SR-9 between Sedro Woolley and Mount Vernon for 24 consecutive hours, focusing on collision-causing violations. The results were encouraging:

- Zero collisions for this 24-hour period
- 206 violators contacted
- 28 seat belt contacts
- 8 DUIs (including two daytime DUIs)
- A wide array of other violations

Trooper Brandon Tobol deserves special praise for his efforts to create partnerships with local businesses, schools, and government entities to minimize or eliminate collisions on SR-536, reducing congestion in Mount Vernon, and reducing the exposure of pedestrians during the Tulip Festival. This trooper was able to mediate a relationship between the WSDOT and the Washington State University (WSU) extension program on SR-536. This mediation resulted in a land donation by WSU to WSDOT. The purpose of the land donation was to provide WSDOT with enough land to install a left turn lane in front of the WSU extension. This area had experienced years of serious rear end injury collisions as a result of cars stopping in a through lane to make the left turn into the WSU extension building parking lot. This area experienced numerous “near misses” as motorists would pass other vehicles unsafely on the right to avoid a collision.

Trooper Tobol also worked closely with the largest event planners in APA 31, the Tulip Festival Committee. This committee organizes an annual event during the month of April that increases local congestion by drawing tourists from around the world. Tobol, after years of resistance, was able to provide information to the Tulip Festival Committee about safer and less-congested routes for traffic entering APA 31 from the southern portion of the county. These routes would ease congestion on I-5, SR-536, and through the city of Mount Vernon. Additionally, Trooper Tobol contacted local tulip farms to discuss the problem of illegal parking in the roadway and unsafe pedestrian crossing between tulip fields. Tobol worked closely with WSDOT and facilitated the installation of signage to warn motorists of the pedestrians. He also worked closely with the tulip farms to develop signs and parking areas intended to prevent collisions and minimize the risk of serious injuries.

Assessment

The Skagit Community Connection project was completed on December 31, 2010, with one significant benchmark – the elimination of fatal collisions in APA 31. This project started with a staggering 18 fatal collisions in 2008. During the first year of the project there was a 26% decrease in fatal collisions with 2009 having 13. Unfortunately, 46% of these fatal collisions involved impairment, 30% involved occupant restraint violations, 15% involved speed violations, and 15% involved motorcycles. In 2009 there was one fatal collision on the interstate, six fatal collisions on state routes, and six fatal collisions on county roads.

However, 2010 would prove to be more successful than 2009 (Fig. 14). There was a 46% decrease in fatal collisions, decreasing from 13 in 2009 to 7 in 2010. The measure of success improved dramatically; one (14%) of these seven collisions involved impairment, one (14%) of the fatal collisions involved occupant restraint violations, and 2 (28%) of the fatal collisions involved speed. Unfortunately, 42% (3) of the fatal collisions involved motorcycles.

The final measure of success is where APA 31 stands today. As of April 18, 2011, there have been no fatal collisions in APA 31. There have been no fatal collisions in APA 31 since November 22, 2010. There have been no fatal collisions on a state route or interstate in APA 31 since August 17, 2010. Unfortunately, the one fatal collision in the last eight months in APA 31 occurred on a county road involving an impaired motorist who was not wearing a seat belt. There is still work to be done.

Troopers continue to work in many of their assigned areas. We continue to use the Time and Activity System tracking codes to identify problems and direct strategies toward the elimination of fatal collisions on county roads.

Troopers continue to develop creative ideas to address ongoing problems in the community. An important aspect of this POP project developed out of the assessment phase. We discovered that many of the fatal collisions in 2010 occurred on SR-20. This discovery prompted another POP project directed at targeting the problems that are currently plaguing SR-20. Finally, community involvement improved, fatal collisions decreased, and work effort improved using strategic planning to focus enforcement strategies into problem areas.

APPENDICES

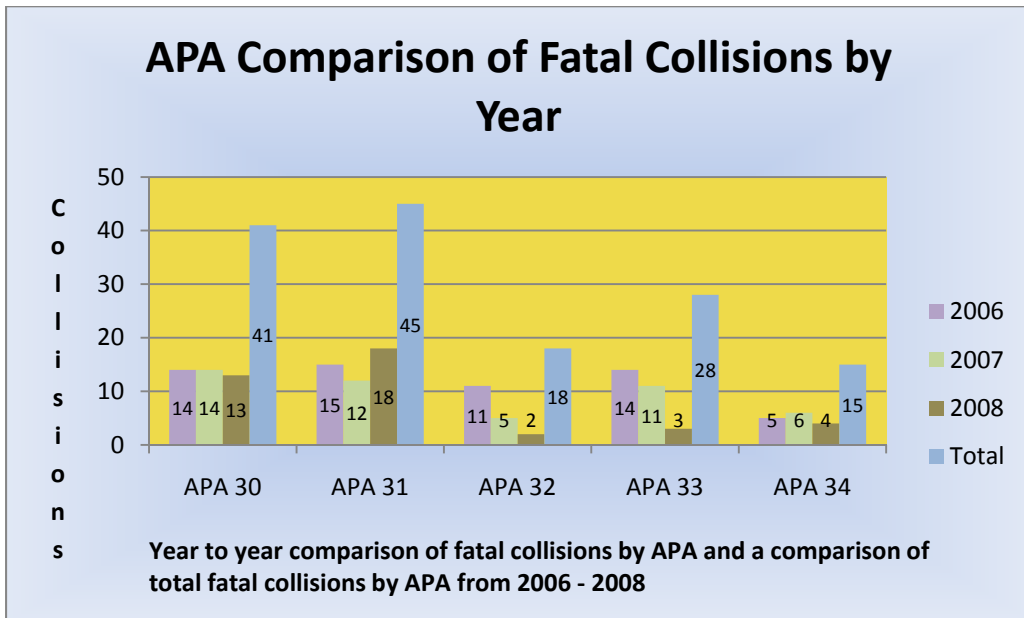


Figure 1

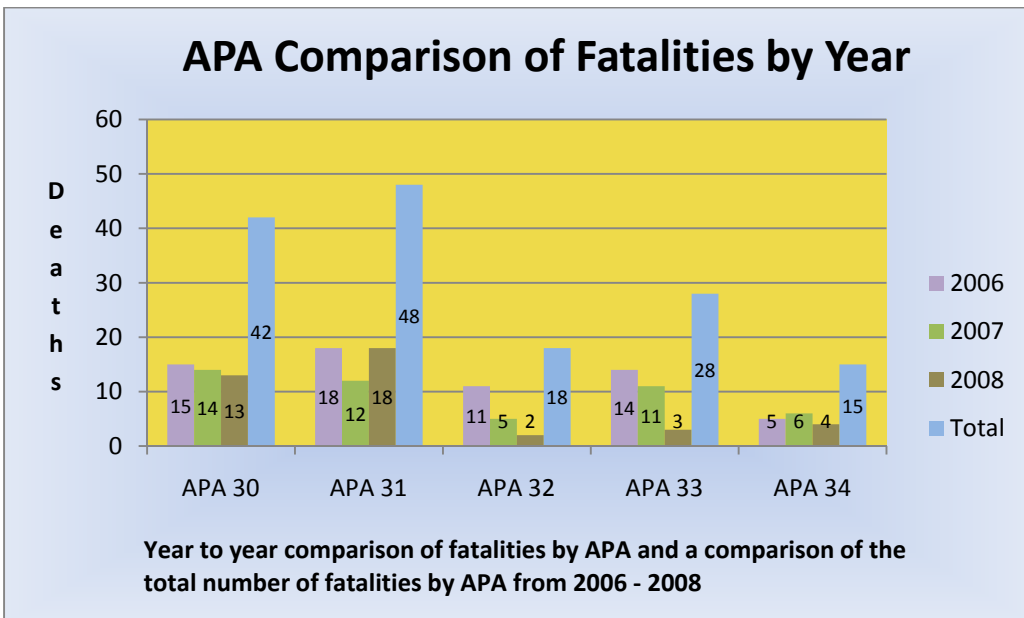


Figure 2

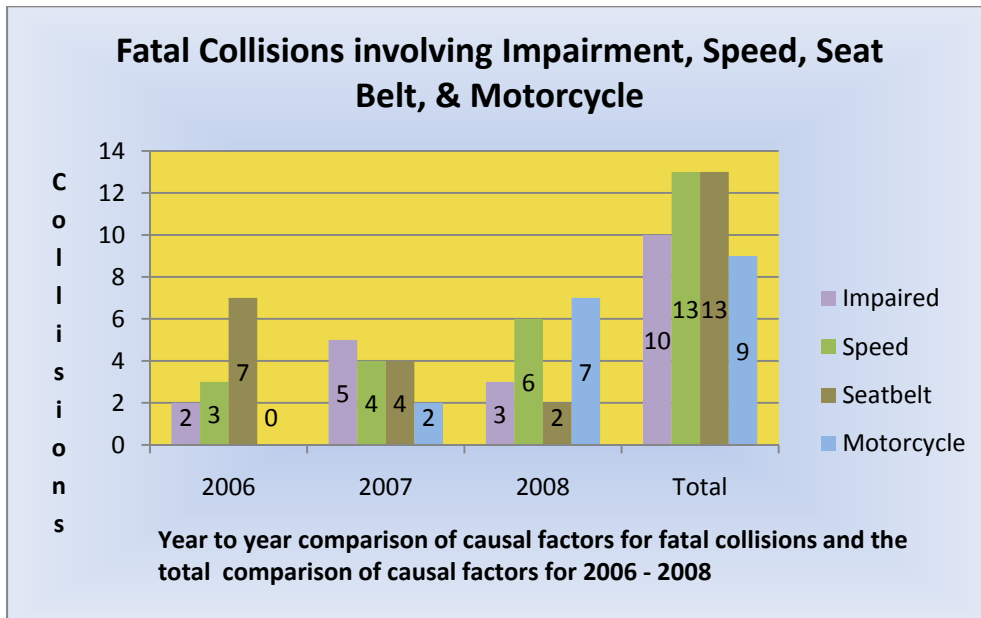


Figure 3

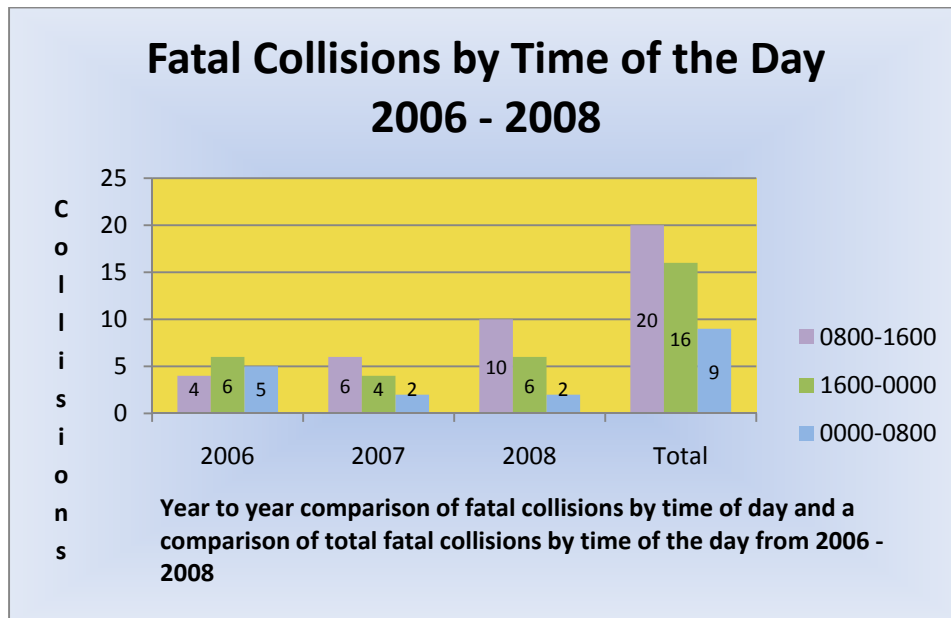


Figure 4

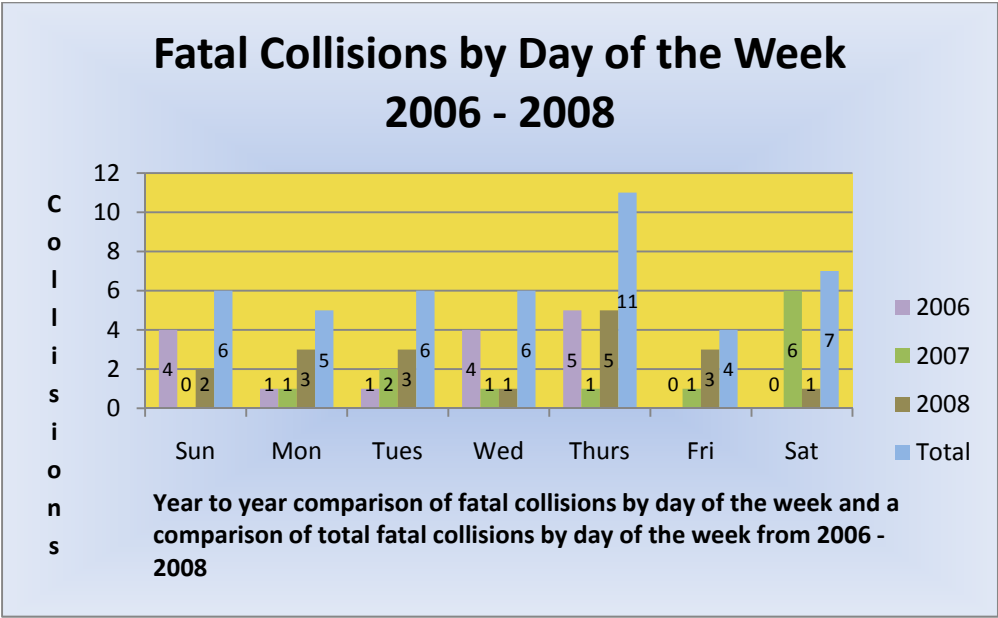


Figure 5

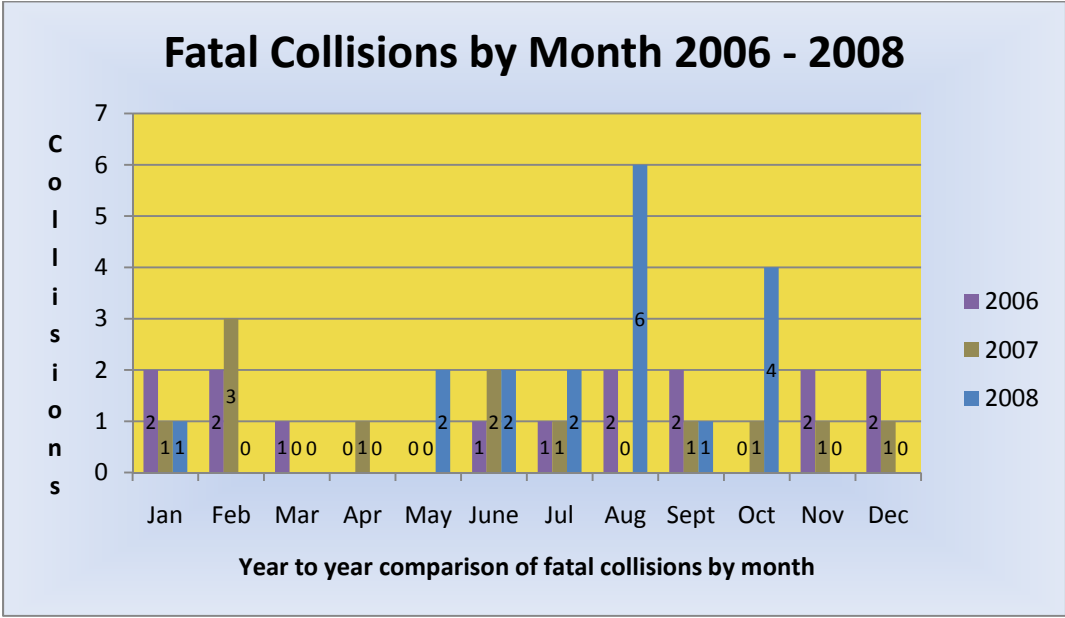


Figure 6

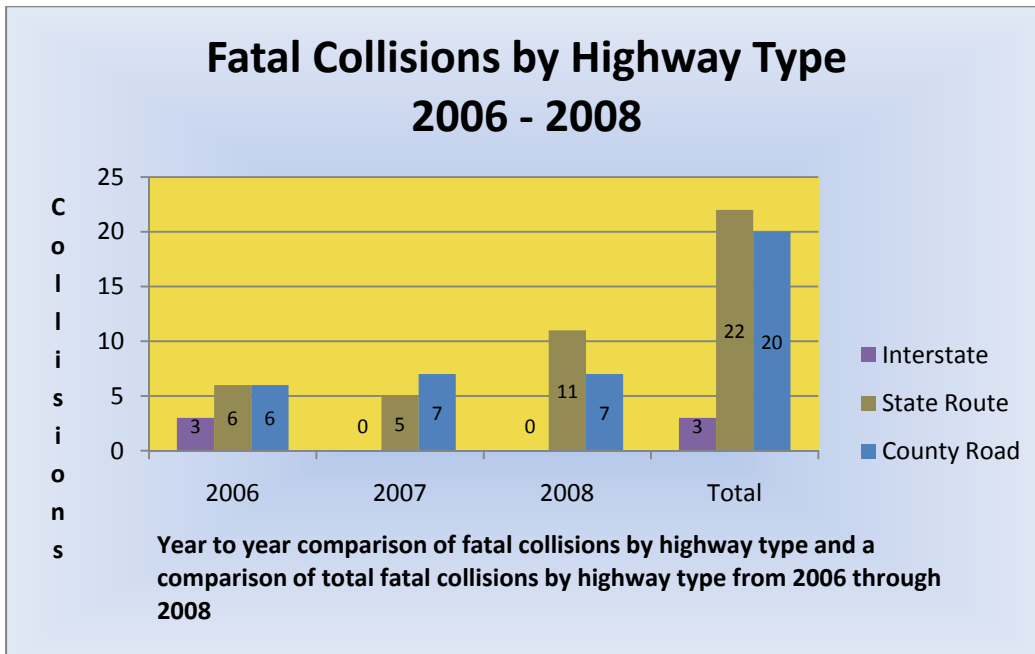


Figure 7

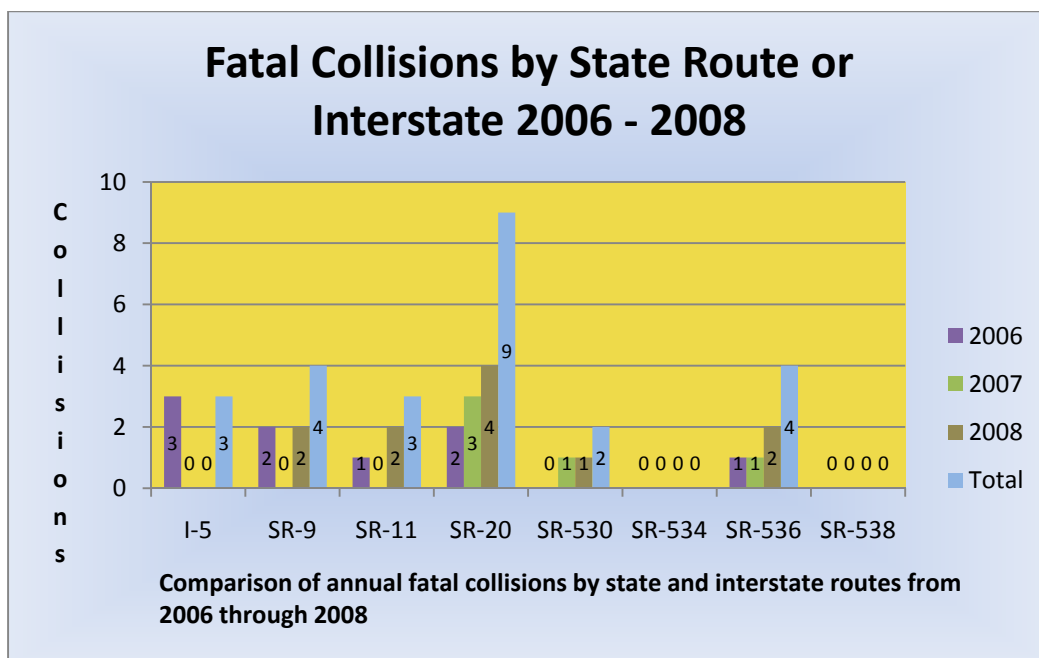


Figure 8

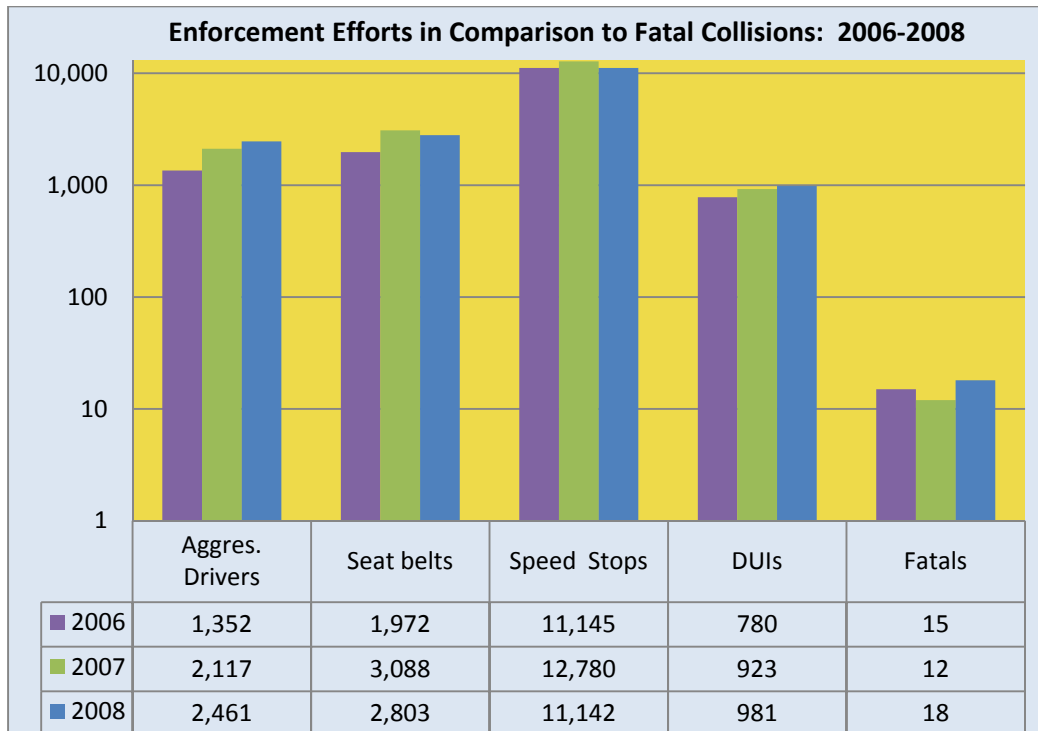


Figure 9. Fatal collisions compared to enforcement efforts in speed, impaired drivers, seat belt violations, and aggressive drivers from 2006 through 2008 (logarithmic scale)

Trooper Erin Wilson #445 erin.wilson@wsp.wa.gov	SR 11 from mile post 0 to Whatcom County
Trooper Brandon Tobol #1224 brandon.tobol@wsp.wa.gov	SR-536 and SR-538
Trooper Mike Peterson #466 mike.peterson@wsp.wa.gov	SR-534; SR-9 from SR-534 to Snohomish County
Trooper Mark Francis #990 mark.francis@wsp.wa.gov	SR-20 from I-5 to Anacortes
Trooper Scott Gustafson #790 scott.gustafson@wsp.wa.gov	SR-20 from I-5 to Sedro Woolley
Trooper Ed Collins #512 ed.collins@wsp.wa.gov	SR-20 from Sedro Woolley to Hamilton
Trooper Brandon Lee #929 brandon.lee@wsp.wa.gov	SR-20 from Hamilton to Winthrop
Trooper Kevin Nelson #812 kevin.nelson@wsp.wa.gov	SR-9 from Sedro Woolley to Whatcom County
Trooper Clancey Aguero #305 clancey.aguero@wsp.wa.gov	SR-9 from Sedro Woolley to SR-538
Trooper Jason Betts #316 jason.betts@wsp.wa.gov	SR-9 from SR-538 to SR-534
Trooper Maurice Kon #914 maurice.kon@wsp.wa.gov	I-5 from Nulle Road to mile post 236
Trooper Scott Betts #516 scott.betts@wsp.wa.gov	I-5 from mile post 236 to mile post 230
Trooper Mike Rudy #1005 mike.rudy@wsp.wa.gov	I-5 from mile post 230 to mile post 224
Trooper Sage Schafer sage.schafer@wsp.wa.gov	I-5 from mile post 224 to mile post 218
Sergeant Jason Armstrong #290 jason.armstrong@wsp.wa.gov	Detachment 3 Supervisor
Sergeant Dan Turner #156 dan.turner@wsp.wa.gov	Detachment 11 Supervisor

Figure 10. Assigned areas of responsibility for the Skagit Community Connection

991: All county roads west of I-5, north of SR-11, and south of Whatcom County.
992: All county roads south of SR-11, west of I-5, and north of SR-20.
993: All county roads south of SR-20, west of I-5, and north of Snohomish County.
994: All county roads east of I-5, west of SR-9, north of Cook Road, and south of Whatcom County (9 to 5 Corridor).
995: All county roads east of I-5, west of SR-9, south of Cook Road, and north of SR-538.
996: All county roads east of I-5, West of SR-9, south of SR-538, and north of SR-534.
997: All county roads east of I-5, west of SR-9, south of SR-534, and north of Snohomish County
998: All county roads east of SR-9, north of SR-20, and south of Whatcom County.
999: All county roads east of SR-9, south of SR-20, and north of Snohomish County.

Figure 11. County Road Designators

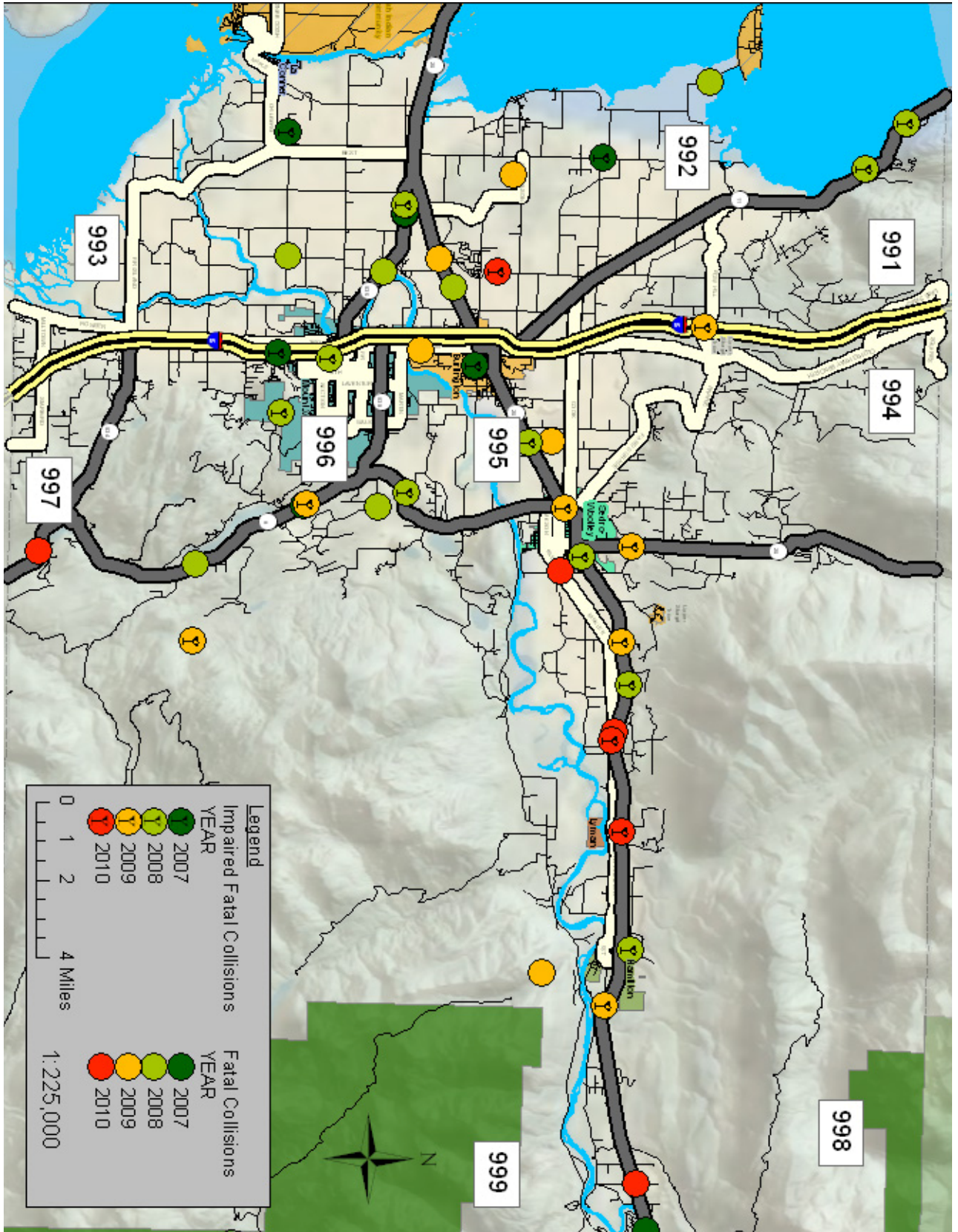


Figure 11A. Skagit County Fatal Collision Map

**Skagit
Community
Connection**



**Working together
addressing
community
concerns.**



**Our Traffic Safety
Partners**



- Anacortes Police Department
- Burlington Police Department
- Mount Vernon Police Department
- Sedro Woolley Police Department
- Skagit County Sheriff's Office
- Swinomish Tribe
- Upper Skagit Tribe

3000-110-161 7/09

**Washington
State
Patrol**

**Skagit
Community
Connection**



**Enhancing the safety
and security of Skagit
County by creating
partnerships with our
residents, community
leaders, schools, and
businesses.**

Figure 12. Tri-fold brochure handed out to local businesses and government offices



Figure 13. 24-Hour Emphasis Patrol



Figure 13A. Safety Fair

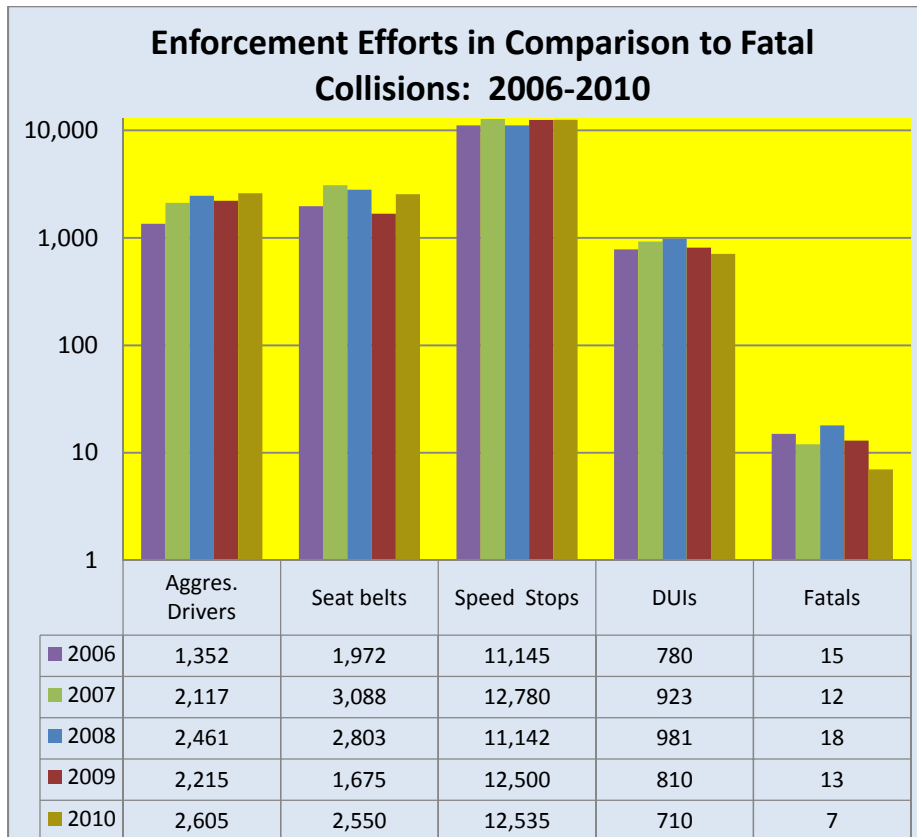


Figure 14. Fatal collisions compared to enforcement efforts in speed, impaired drivers, seat belt violations, and aggressive drivers from 2006 through 2010 (logarithmic scale)