



Contact: J.P. Gillach
Minnesota Department of Transportation
612-248-0257
james.gillach@state.mn.us>



Contact: John Undeland
Roadway Safety Foundation
703-785-3461
info@roadwaysafety.org

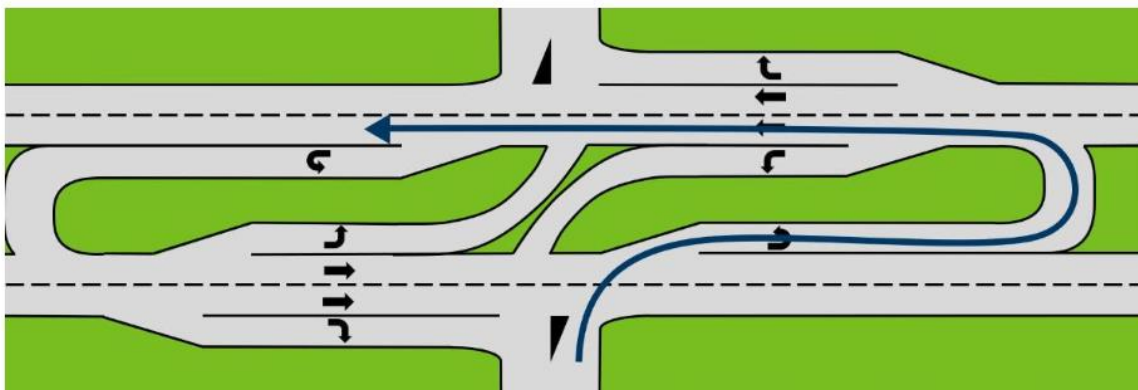
For release: 12:30 p.m. CST, Nov. 29, 2023

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION HONORED FOR WIDESPREAD USE OF “J-TURN INTERSECTIONS” TO REDUCE SEVERITY OF CRASHES
2023 National Roadway Safety Awards recognize innovations to protect pedestrians, cyclists and motorists as pandemic spike in U.S. road fatalities continues largely unabated

WASHINGTON, DC – The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) was honored today with a 2023 National Roadway Safety Award for its widespread use of “J-turn intersections” that have significantly reduced the severity of crashes on high-speed divided highways.

MnDOT has built J-turns at more than 80 intersections since 2010, mostly on divided rural expressways. A 2021 evaluation of those intersections found a 69 percent reduction in fatal and serious injury crashes, compared with before the J-turns were installed. The state’s first J-turn intersection, in Willmar, has had no fatal or serious injury crashes since its construction.

J-turns are used on four-lane divided highways, where intersecting side roads typically have too little traffic to meet federal guidelines for a traffic light. Raised medians require motorists approaching the highway from side roads to turn right. Those who had wanted to head left or straight through the intersection can then pull into a designated left lane to make a U-turn.



Left turning path from crossroad onto mainline at RCI.

That design prevents drivers from having to cross multiple lanes of fast-moving traffic, putting them at risk of getting “T-boned” – one of the deadliest types of collisions.

Derek Leuer, MnDOT's state traffic safety engineer, said while the number of collisions at intersections remains about the same after J-turns are installed, there are far fewer fatalities and serious injuries. That's because any crashes tend to be lower-speed rear-enders, often when hesitant motorists begin to pull out from the side road and then stop suddenly when they change their minds.

"Door panels and bumpers can be replaced," Leuer said. "People cannot."

The 10 National Roadway Safety Award winners and two honorable mentions are using proactive, data-driven, collaborative and cost-effective approaches to better protect pedestrians, cyclists and motorists across the country. Much of their work began amid a nationwide spike in vehicular crashes during the pandemic, when U.S. [roadway fatalities rose 7.3 percent in 2020 and a further 10.1 percent in 2021 before holding steady at a high level in 2022 \(-0.3 percent\)](#).

Early estimates for the first half of 2023 show crash fatalities declined slightly but [remain at levels not seen since the mid-2000s](#). Between January and June, fatalities nationwide declined by an estimated 3.3 percent, compared with the first six months of 2022, according to the [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#) (NHTSA).

First-half 2023 fatalities in Minnesota fell farther: An estimated 163 people died on Minnesota roads, down 11.7 percent from the same time frame last year, according to [NHTSA's preliminary data](#).

The continued high fatality numbers demonstrate the value of safety innovations like the Minnesota Department of Transportation's J-turn intersections and the 11 other projects from across the nation.

The National Roadway Safety Awards, presented biannually since 1999, are sponsored by the Federal Highway Administration and the nonprofit Roadway Safety Foundation. Projects were evaluated on safety effectiveness, innovation and efficient use of resources.

"The problem-solving creativity and dedication shown by the Minnesota Department of Transportation will save countless lives -- using a data driven approach and practices that are proven to reduce crashes," said Federal Highway Administrator Shailen Bhatt. "It demonstrates a strong commitment to moving Minnesota toward zero deaths and serious injuries on the state's roadways, and we are proud to applaud their efforts."

"The stubbornly elevated fatality numbers underscore the urgent need for innovations like the National Roadway Safety Award honorees' projects," said Roadway Safety Foundation Executive Director Bruce Hamilton. "With several initiatives already showing major reductions in fatalities, injuries and crashes, today's honorees are shining a bright light on the path to safer travel."

Other honorees are:

- **North Carolina:** NCDOT for reducing severe crashes at rural intersections by adding more all-way stops
- **Illinois:** Illinois Tollway for creating an app that shows livestream video of serious crashes to speed up incident response
- **Florida:** FDOT for demonstrating how skid-resistant pavement can shorten stopping distances at high-speed intersections

- **Louisiana:** Acadiana Planning Commission for reducing severe crashes at rural “T” intersections using larger signs and rumble strips to alert distracted drivers
- **Texas:** TxDOT for reducing pedestrian fatalities on an Austin highway, particularly among people experiencing homelessness
- **Delaware:** DeIDOT for reducing fatal and serious injury crashes by converting more intersections to all-way stops
- **New Jersey:** South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization for developing a plan to prioritize cyclist and pedestrian safety in rural Cumberland County
- **New Jersey/New York:** The Port Authority of NY & NJ for reducing crashes by using timely data analysis to proactively identify and address safety problems
- **California:** Caltrans for implementing pedestrian protections, signs to prevent wrong-way driving and other cost-effective safety measures more quickly
- **Virginia:** VDOT (Honorable Mention) for funding lower-cost safety projects in a more systemic way aimed at preventing traffic fatalities and serious injuries
- **Nevada:** NDOT (Honorable Mention) for its first comprehensive plan to reduce speeding, a leading cause of fatal and severe crashes

Winners were selected by an expert panel of judges:

- Lori Diaz, The American Traffic Safety Services Foundation
- Jennifer Hall, American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials
- Adam Kirk, Kentucky Transportation Center
- Stephen Read, Virginia Department of Transportation
- Brian Roberts, Transportation Research Board
- Terecia Wilson, Clemson University

For complete details on each of the winners and for more information on the national awards program, visit: www.roadwaysafety.org/awards

The Roadway Safety Foundation is a 501(c)(3) charitable and educational organization. Our mission is to reduce the frequency and severity of motor vehicle crashes, injuries and fatalities by improving roadway systems and their environment.