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NOTE: Award presentation photo to follow by 3 p.m. CST

**TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION HONORED
FOR REDUCING PEDESTRIAN FATALITIES ON AUSTIN'S I-35**
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 Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) was honored today with a 2023 National Roadway Safety Award for working with community leaders to address concerns about pedestrians crossing Interstate 35 in Austin, thereby, significantly reducing the number of fatalities.

TxDOT also was recognized for working with nonprofit and faith-based groups, as part of the Austin District Initiative to Address Homelessness, to help people living in encampments near the highway move to safe, dignified housing in a repurposed TxDOT maintenance yard.

“We leveraged our most valuable asset – our relationships,” said Mike Arellano, deputy district engineer for TxDOT’s Austin District.

As of June 2023, the targeted section of I-35 had experienced 64 percent fewer pedestrian fatalities overall and 89 percent fewer fatalities among pedestrians facing homelessness, compared with 2019.

Before the Mobility35 pedestrian safety program called “Be Safe, Be Seen” launched in 2017, people who lived in the encampment on TxDOT right-of-way comprised 80 percent of pedestrian fatalities in the 3.3-mile section of I-35 between 51st Street and Rundberg Boulevard. Many were hit at night as they tried to cross the highway to reach stores and a fast-food restaurant.

TxDOT partnered with the Federal Highway Administration to study that stretch of I-35 because of the disproportionate number of pedestrians killed. The interstate in this location is 15 lanes (about 250 feet) wide, including feeder lanes and ramps.

To combat the problem, TxDOT gave “Be Safe, Be Seen” reflective bags to people in the encampments to help them be better seen, especially at night. The bags also contained educational material with suggested pedestrian routes, especially near work zones. TxDOT also gave the reflective bags to children who cross the highway via an overpass sidewalk to reach

Webb Middle School. Though no children had been involved in pedestrian fatalities, TxDOT wanted to further ensure their safety.

After realizing that rebuilding part of I-35 would dislocate people in the encampments, TxDOT also partnered with local organizations to encourage those residents to move to the [Esperanza Community](#), a non-congregative emergency shelter set up in a TxDOT maintenance yard. The facility is operated by the nonprofit The Other Ones Foundation to assist residents' transition to permanent housing.

"We knew eliminating all superstructures on I-35 would eliminate shelter for a large number of individuals," Arellano said. "Transportation agencies are not equipped to address a humanitarian issue like this. We knew we needed help."

Between 2020 and 2022, TxDOT also installed a two-foot panel atop the highway median's concrete barrier with "no pedestrian crossing" signs to deter people from risking death or injury by trying to make the illegal crossing.

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 Texas held steady: An estimated 2,089 people died on Texas roads, declining by less than 1 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 TxDOT's I-35 pedestrian safety program 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 Texas 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 Texas 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
- **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
- **Minnesota:** MnDOT for its widespread use of “J-turn” intersections on high-speed divided highways to reduce the severity of crashes
- **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.