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‘SAFER BY DESIGN’ TOOL TO SAVE LIVES ON RURAL TEXAS ROADS, WINS 1 OF JUST 7 NATIONAL ROADWAY SAFETY AWARDS

Texas Roadways in 2020 Saw Most Fatalities Since 2003; Fatality Rate Twice as High on Rural Roads

WASHINGTON, DC – The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) and the Texas A&M Transportation Institute (TTI) were honored today with a 2021 National Roadway Safety Award for developing a user-friendly tool for roadway designers to cumulatively assess the safety characteristics of rural highway design. The biennial awards program is sponsored jointly by the Federal Highway Administration and the Roadway Safety Foundation.

U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, speaking about TxDOT-TTI and the other award winners, said: “Congratulations to today’s seven honorees for the remarkable work they’ve done to protect the traveling public. They are proof that we have no shortage of willpower or good ideas for improving roadway safety.”

More people (3,896) died on Texas roadways in 2020 than in any year since at least 2003. Texas roadway crash fatalities rose 7.5 percent in 2020 over the prior year, despite a 9.8 percent decrease in miles traveled due to the pandemic. Nationwide, an estimated one-third of highway fatalities are related to deficient roadway conditions.

With fatalities occurring on Texas rural non-interstate roads at more than twice the rate of other road types, TxDOT partnered with TTI to help designers understand how various design features can improve safety. The “Safer by Design” tool scores how safe existing lane changes are on roads, by looking at factors like lane and shoulder width, horizontal and vertical curve geometry, clearances to objects, and other variables.

Viewed as instrumental in helping the State achieve its goal of zero fatalities on Texas roadways by 2050, TxDOT now requires use of the tool for all non-interstate rural projects, ranging from routine maintenance to complete reconstruction projects. TxDOT is initially focusing on rural roads, as design changes there can have a larger impact, but have plans to incorporate similar “Safer by Design” practices for all roadways. “Safety is top of mind for everything we do at TxDOT, and we strive to innovate and integrate safety improvements in all our projects around the state,” said TxDOT Executive Director Marc Williams. “I am proud of the work we have accomplished on this and the continued collaboration with TTI to develop tools and technologies that will help us combat the growing number of traffic fatalities that we have seen across both Texas and the nation.”

TTI Agency Director Greg Winfree said: “Funded by TxDOT and developed by TTI researchers, the ‘Safer by Design’ tool is an excellent example of how the two agencies have worked together for more than 70 years to improve transportation safety for Texans. We recognize that rural traffic safety is an issue in all 50 states, with

rural roads being a major contributor to vehicle fatalities. This tool can help save lives, not only in the Lone Star State but nationwide.”

National Roadway Safety Foundation Executive Director added: “Last year’s jump in fatalities was alarming, but innovations like ‘Safer by Design’ tool will save lives by helping roadway designers better evaluate the safety outcomes of a wide range of design elements, Future travelers in Texas, whose lives and limbs will be spared by this initiative, will owe an unknowing debt of gratitude to these highway heroes. We urge DOTs across the nation to look at TxDOT-TTI and other awardees’ innovations and replicate them wherever possible.”

Texas’ award was one of just seven National Roadway Safety Awards selected from a nationwide pool of applicants and evaluated on three criteria: Effectiveness, Innovation, and Efficient Use of Resources. Since 1999, the awards program has honored outstanding projects involving infrastructure, operational or program-related innovations helping lead the nation to zero highway fatalities. Other awardees are:

- City of Bellevue, WA for its video analytics traffic safety program;
- Broward Metropolitan Planning Organization for its Complete Streets Master Plan;
- North Carolina Dept. of Transportation for its long-life pavement markings safety effort;
- Village of Whitefish Bay, WI for its community-wide roadway safety improvements;
- California Dept. of Transportation for its 2020-2024 Strategic Highway Safety Plan update; and
- Florida Dept. of Transportation for its use of smart work zone safety technologies.

Winners were selected by an expert panel of judges from a variety of disciplines.

For complete details on each of the winners, and for more information on the national awards program, visit <http://www.safety.fhwa.dot.gov/roadwaysafetyawards/>.

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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 through improvements to roadway systems and their environment.