
Traffic Safety Programs: Issues to Consider for Reauthorization

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Overview

- Principles for restructuring and funding surface transportation programs
- Recent GAO work on traffic safety
- Issues for Congress to consider in reauthorizing traffic safety programs

Principles for Restructuring and Funding Surface Transportation Programs

- Define the federal role based on areas of national interest and goals
- Incorporate performance and accountability into funding decisions
- Employ the best tools and approaches to improve results and return on investment
- Ensure fiscal sustainability

Recent GAO Work on Traffic Safety

www.gao.gov

- NHTSA Traffic Safety Grant Programs
 - GAO-08-398
- NHTSA High Visibility Enforcement (HVE) Program
 - GAO-08-477
- NHTSA Oversight
 - GAO-08-788
- FHWA Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP)
 - Ongoing work
- Older Driver Safety
 - GAO-07-413

Traffic Safety Grant Programs

- NHTSA made substantial progress in implementing the grant programs
- Safety officials in 7 states agree that the grants are helping to implement activities that address key safety issues
- Some eligibility and management difficulties for states
 - Passing laws to meet eligibility requirements
 - Managing grant applications, deadlines, and timing
 - Flexibility of some grants funds

HVE Program

- NHTSA has disseminated advertising, coordinated with states, and evaluated the campaigns
 - Safety officials in 7 states noted that HVE campaigns help increase safety belt use and reduce alcohol-involved fatalities
 - NHTSA's evaluations limited by inconsistent information on state activities and performance measures that could be more comprehensive
 - States face challenges in reaching resistant populations, finding sufficient resources to conduct the campaigns, and weak prosecution of impaired-driving offenders
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HVE Program – GAO Recommendations

To improve NHTSA's evaluations of the HVE campaigns:

- Develop a minimum core set of reporting requirements for states to report their federally-funded HVE law enforcement and media activities
- Include additional performance measures, such as a measure for nighttime safety belt use and additional measures of media effectiveness

NHTSA Oversight

- NHTSA has improved grant oversight in response to SAFETEA-LU requirement and GAO recommendation
- NHTSA regional offices varied in documenting management reviews and tracking state actions on recommendations
- NHTSA does not analyze recommendations on a national level to identify common state challenges, such as monitoring sub-grantee performance and grant expenditure rates
- Some states have a consistently high number of fatalities, but do not meet the criteria for a special management review

NHTSA Oversight – GAO Recommendations

To help states improve management of highway safety grants:

- Periodically analyze recommendations made in management reviews to identify common state challenges
- Periodically assess extent to which states implement recommendations and identify barriers preventing states from doing so
- Identify options to strengthen state monitoring of sub-grantees
- Determine the underlying causes and impact of low grant expenditure rates and identify potential solutions
- Identify options to target safety expertise and technical assistance to states with a high number of fatalities

Highway Safety Improvement Program – Preliminary Results

- States have developed strategic highway safety plans; safety officials from 6 states said the planning process is beneficial
- FHWA officials consider the collaboration among various stakeholders to be the most important result
- States have not fully implemented crash data analysis systems; FHWA has not established deadlines for key efforts related to crash data analysis
- Preliminary evidence raises questions about how well provisions related to rail-highway crossings, high-risk rural roads, and fund transfers are aligned with states' safety priorities

Issues for Congress to Consider in Reauthorizing Traffic Safety Programs

- Federal role: Identify national safety priorities and set goals
- Performance accountability: Include additional mechanisms to link state performance with traffic safety grant awards
- Tools: Reduce administrative and management challenges
 - Consolidate applications
 - Simplify application procedures and deadlines
 - Allow states to use grants for a broader range of activities
- Changes such as these would require improved state data; also, NHTSA might need to adjust oversight approach