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Transurban-Fluor and AAA Survey: Fifty-six Percent of Capital Beltway Drivers Distracted by Cell Phone Use; One-in-four Reading or Writing Text Messages

Distracted Drivers in Capital Beltway Construction Zone Focus of Extensive Regional Campaign

Alexandria, VA – Today, Transurban-Fluor and AAA Mid-Atlantic released a report on distracted Capital Beltway drivers and launched a regional campaign focused on reducing distracted driving in the Capital Beltway (I-495) HOT Lanes construction zone. According to the report, 56 percent of drivers on the Capital Beltway are distracted by some form of cell phone use, and these cell phone users are more than twice as likely to have had a near miss or traffic incident as a result of their behavior.

“Virginia has taken great strides in improving highway safety and reducing the number of traffic fatalities year-after-year, but distracted driving is reaching a critical level,” said Pierce R. Homer, Virginia Secretary of Transportation. “Driving while distracted is a recipe for disaster – especially in construction zones.”

The Transurban-Fluor and AAA report is based upon a survey of 1,047 drivers who travel the Virginia side of the Capital Beltway. That survey data reveals that the chance of an incident or near miss doubles when the driver is using a cell phone compared to the chance of an incident or near miss for a non-cell phone user (24 percent vs. 11 percent). The survey also indicated that cell phone use while driving on the Beltway is a frequent behavior, with one-third of those respondents who use their cell phones admitting to doing so “most times.”

While driving and using a cell phone to make calls is dangerous, driving while reading or writing text messages is exceptionally dangerous. According to the survey, approximately one-in-four Capital Beltway drivers is reading or writing a text. Of those reading texts, 39 percent report having had a traffic incident or near miss as a result of that behavior. Of those writing texts, 50 percent report having had a



near miss or traffic incident as a result. In fact, those who read or write texts are more than three times as likely to have been in an incident or near miss than other Capital Beltway drivers.

“The survey results are alarming and confirm what we have long known about traffic safety: When people are behind the wheel, driving should be their first and only interest,” commented Lon Anderson, director of public and government relations, AAA Mid-Atlantic. “Driving in a busy construction zone, which poses more challenges than the already difficult driving conditions on the Capital Beltway, requires an even greater focus.”

Construction of the \$2 billion Capital Beltway HOT Lanes is underway along a 14-mile stretch of the Beltway in Virginia from the Springfield Interchange to just north of the Dulles Toll Road. The project includes four new Beltway lanes and the replacement of more than \$268 million dollars of aging infrastructure including 58 bridges and overpasses. Every Beltway interchange bridge and overpass must be demolished and rebuilt to accommodate the wider Beltway. New sound walls are going up to triple the noise protection for adjacent communities. Pedestrian and bike paths also are being added to every new bridge crossing over the Beltway. HOT Lanes construction is expected to be completed in late 2012.

Despite the enormous scale and complexity of construction on the Capital Beltway, driver behavior has not changed significantly. Forty-six percent of Capital Beltway drivers polled have made no change to their cell phone behavior while driving in the construction zone. Of the self-identified regular commuters on the Capital Beltway, just 26 percent have changed their cell phone behavior in the construction zone. Among the most dangerous group, just 16 percent say that they make a conscious effort not to read or write texts in the construction zone.

“We need the full attention of drivers when traveling in the changing and constricted construction zone on the Capital Beltway,” said Tim Steinhilber, Transurban-Fluor’s General Manager for the Capital Beltway HOT Lanes Project. “Behind the cones, we are making a significant effort to ensure motorist and worker safety, but we need drivers to work with us. While in the construction zone, please focus on driving.”

The Transurban-Fluor partnership holds the safe construction and operation of roadways as a core value. As of July 2009, the Capital Beltway HOT Lanes Project attained 1.3 million safe work hours without a lost work day incident. This incident rate is significantly better than the national average.

This driver call to action was echoed by Colonel W. Steven Flaherty, Virginia State Police Superintendent. “It is imperative all motorists work to eliminate driver inattention on our roads, especially when maneuvering through work zones,” remarked Colonel Flaherty. “Whether you are driving drowsy, dialing a phone number, or shuffling through an I-pod, distracted drivers aren’t concentrating on what they

should be doing behind the wheel – driving. This behavior is extremely dangerous to everyone on the road. In an effort to limit distractions, Virginia State Police has increased its visibility in these work zones to deter such behavior.”

The survey also revealed that awareness of distracted driving dangers does make a difference. Nearly three-quarters of those who recall seeing or hearing a story on distracted driving have changed their behavior in construction zones. Recognizing the impact of awareness, Transurban-Fluor and AAA Mid-Atlantic, in partnership with the Federal Highway Administration, Virginia Department of Transportation, Virginia State Police, Fairfax County, and Fairfax County Police Department today announced the launch of the **“Orange Cones. No Phones”** awareness campaign.

Focused on increasing awareness of the dangers of distracted driving in construction zones, “Orange Cones. No Phones.” will run advertising on broadcast, online and social networking venues in addition to generating educational materials for schools and employers. The campaign will run throughout the fall of 2009.

For more information on the Capital Beltway HOT Lanes project and how the new HOT Lanes will impact you and your community, or for additional information on the “Orange Cones. No Phones.” campaign, visit www.virginiahotlanes.com.

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