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Survey of Northern Virginia Law Enforcement Reveals Texting While Driving Tops Speeding and Aggressive Driving as the Most Dangerous Driver Behavior in Construction Zones

National Transportation Safety Board Chairman and Virginia Secretary of Transportation Underscore Dangers of Distracted Driving, Recognize Law Enforcement

Alexandria, Va. - According to a 495 Express Lanes survey of law enforcement officers serving in Northern Virginia, texting while driving is the most dangerous behavior in construction zones, ahead of speeding, aggressive driving and not obeying changing traffic patterns. Today, in conjunction with National Work Zone Awareness Week, partners on one of the largest highway construction projects in the region released these findings in a new distracted driving report.

National Transportation Safety Board Chairman Deborah Hersman and Virginia Secretary of Transportation Sean T. Connaughton underscored the dangers of distracted driving and recognized state and local law enforcement for their efforts in keeping work zones safe at an Orange Cones. No Phones. event held today in the 495 Express Lanes construction corridor. The 495 Express Lanes construction zone is among the largest in the region with 14 miles of construction and approximately 1,100 construction workers on the road each day.

“Texting or talking on a cell phone while driving increases your crash risk – when you are distracted in a construction zone you have compounded the danger to yourself and others,” Chairman Hersman said. “It’s time to take driving seriously and put our attention back on the road where it belongs.”

Secretary Connaughton added, “Navigating the extensive work zones in Northern Virginia requires drivers’ full attention. Now more than ever, it is important for drivers to realize that distracted driving in a construction work zone poses an enormous threat to the safety of our workers and their fellow travelers.” Connaughton continued, “We applaud our state and local law enforcement officers who work tirelessly to keep our roadways safe for all drivers and construction workers.”

The new survey of Northern Virginia law enforcement officers found that despite the danger created by texting-related distracted driving in construction zones, an estimated 40 percent of drivers operating their vehicles in a construction zone are using a cell phone. The net result is more traffic incidents. In fact, 78 percent of responding law enforcement officials indicated that the number of automobile crashes/incidents in construction zones has increased since they joined their department.

For responding local police officers, the cause behind the increase in incidents is clear. Cell phone use overall is the primary cause of crashes responded to in an estimated 34 percent of instances, more than double speeding (13 percent) or aggressive driving (15 percent) as a primary cause.

The 495 Express Lanes project includes the replacement of more than \$260 million of aging infrastructure including 58 bridges and overpasses. Construction is expected to be completed in late 2012. With only a few months of construction remaining and more than 4 million safe work hours without a lost-time accident, Express Lanes partners are focused on maintaining a safe work zone and keeping all travelers and workers safe.

“With regional traffic congestion consuming so much time, drivers feel the need to get greater control of their lives at the expense of complete control of their vehicles,” said Tim Steinhilber, Transurban-Fluor’s General Manager for the 495 Express Lanes Project. “The few minutes saved by making a call or sending a text are simply not worth the resulting danger. We strongly encourage all drivers to remain vigilant during these last few months of construction and to keep their eyes on the road, their hands on the wheel and their phones on hold.”

Subtract cell phone use while driving, and the traffic safety equation improves significantly. Three out of four law enforcement officers indicated that eliminating cell phone use (including texting) while driving would dramatically reduce the number of traffic incidents, compared to about half of the officers stating that eliminating driving under the influence would dramatically reduce the number of incidents.

“Using a cell phone while driving should be socially unacceptable,” said Lon Anderson, Managing Director of Public and Government Relations, AAA Mid-Atlantic. “Northern Virginia law enforcement is saying that you can reduce your chances of causing a crash or incident in a construction zone by more than a third simply by putting your cell phone away. Don’t text while driving and don’t take messages from those who do.”

Orange Cones. No Phones. surveyed 402 police officers in Northern Virginia from March 21 to March 30, 2012. Participating departments include Virginia State Police, Fairfax County Police Department, Prince William County Police and the City of Alexandria Police. The survey results were released at an event hosted at the future Westpark Bridge Express Lanes Connector Ramp in Tysons Corner, Va.

About Orange Cones. No Phones.

Launched in 2009, Orange Cones. No Phones. is a partnership between Transurban-Fluor and AAA Mid-Atlantic, supported by Federal Highway Administration, Virginia Department of Transportation, Virginia State Police and Fairfax County Police. Focused on reducing distracted driving in the 495 Express Lanes construction corridor, to date the campaign has reached target-drivers with more than 17-million impressions via media, advertising, high school assemblies, social media and in-person events. For more information on Orange Cones. No Phones. visit www.orangeconesnophones.com

For more information on the 495 Express Lanes project and how the new Express Lanes will benefit you and your community, visit www.495ExpressLanes.com.

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