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Media Contacts:

Mike McGurk
mmcgurk@transurban.com
571.419.6105

Lon Anderson
landerson@aaamidatlantic.com
202.481.6820

Fifty-six Percent of I-95 Drivers Distracted by Cell Phone Use; Construction not Enough to Stop Dangerous Behavior, Transurban-Fluor, AAA Survey Finds

Extensive Regional Campaign to Promote Safe Driving in 95 Express Lanes Construction Zone Focuses on Distracted Driving

Alexandria, VA – Today, Transurban-Fluor and AAA Mid-Atlantic released a report on distracted drivers on I-95 in Northern Virginia and launched a regional campaign focused on reducing distracted driving in the 95 Express Lanes construction zone. According to the report, almost all (94 percent) of frequent I-95 drivers have seen someone engage in dangerous, distracted behaviors while driving on I-95. Further, more than half (56 percent) of I-95 drivers use their phone while driving, and these cell phone users are at least twice as likely to have had a traffic incident or near miss as a result of their behavior.

“Practicing safe driving is important not only when traveling through construction zones – but when driving throughout Virginia,” said Sean T. Connaughton, Virginia Secretary of Transportation. “Taking your attention away from the road is dangerous under any condition but it is exceptionally dangerous in a constantly changing construction zone. Programs like Orange Cones. No Phones. – combined with the Commonwealth’s new, tougher distracted driving laws – help us to encourage drivers to put down their phones and focus on driving.”

The Transurban-Fluor and AAA report is based on a survey of 943 drivers who frequently travel through the 95 Express Lanes construction zone corridor. The survey indicates that cell phone use while driving on I-95 is a frequent behavior, with 56 percent of respondents admitting to using their cell phones while driving. According to the survey:

- Nearly one in five I-95 drivers text while driving, with 17 percent of drivers admitting they read texts while driving, and 11 percent admitting they write texts while driving
- Twenty-four percent of I-95 drivers report talking on the phone without a hands-free device and 39 percent talk on the phone with a hands-free device
- Three out of four I-95 drivers recall using their phone while driving within the past week

The report reveals that cell phone use is not only distracting – but dangerous. Nearly a quarter – 23 percent – of I-95 drivers report a near miss or traffic incident as a result of their distracted driving behavior. Cell phone use dramatically increases the odds of an incident or near miss. Drivers who text are nearly three times as likely to have an accident or near miss as compared to non-phone users. Drivers who engage in any cell phone activity while driving – reading or writing a text, talking with or without a handheld device – are two times as likely.

“Driving in a busy construction zone like the 95 Express Lanes corridor requires all of your attention and focus,” said Lon Anderson, Managing Director of Public and Government Affairs, AAA Mid-Atlantic. “It’s important for drivers to remember that taking your eyes off the road for any reason is dangerous. No phone call or text message is worth the safety risk to you and those around you.”

Construction on the 95 Express Lanes is ramping up this summer and drivers should expect to encounter frequent lane closures, reduced shoulders and constantly changing work zones. Major work includes new flyover ramp construction, barrier work, utility relocations, paving and sound wall installation. Drivers should expect nighttime closures and delays when traveling through the work zones. To ensure as smooth a trip as possible when driving through the construction zone, drivers should plan to leave early or plan alternate routes.

“We need the full attention of drivers when traveling in the changing 95 Express Lanes construction zone,” said Kevin Ginnerty, Director of Project Delivery, Transurban. “Drivers need to be alert for work vehicles that enter and exit the construction zone from the left lane. Further, with constricted shoulders and frequent lane closures, it is important for the safety of our workers and travelers on the road that all drivers make a conscious effort to put down their phones – and slow down – when traveling through the construction zone.”

Awareness is helping distracted drivers change their behavior – but not enough. Three out of four I-95 drivers recall recently reading or seeing a news story on the dangers of distracted driving. Despite awareness of these dangers, one in three distracted drivers have not changed their cell phone habits – even in construction zones. Just 20 percent of I-95 drivers have specifically opted to not read or write texts or emails in construction zones. Just 14 percent say that they make a conscious effort to not talk on a cell phone in the construction zone.

“It is imperative that motorists work to eliminate distracted driving behaviors on all Virginia roads and especially those in construction work zones,” said Michael Spivey, Captain, Fairfax Division Commander, Virginia State Police. “In an effort to limit distractions, Virginia State Police has increased its visibility in these work zones. We also remind drivers to limit traditional distractions such as driving while

drowsy or eating in the car – all of these distractions take attention away from driving and increase your risk of an accident.”

Construction of the \$1 billion 95 Express Lanes is currently underway along a 29-mile stretch of I-95 extending from the Edsall Road area in Fairfax County to Garrisonville Road in Stafford County. The project will convert the HOV lanes to express lanes and includes:

- Expanding the existing, reversible HOV lanes from two to three lanes for 14 miles from just north of Edsall Road on I-395 to the Prince William Parkway
- Improving the existing two HOV lanes for six miles from Prince William Parkway to Route 234/Dumfries
- Building a new nine mile reversible extension of existing HOV lanes from Dumfries to Garrisonville Road in Stafford County. Construction of the Express Lanes project is expected to be completed in early 2015

The 95 Express Lanes “Orange Cones. No Phones.” campaign is based on the 495 Express Lanes distracted driving awareness campaign. The campaign will focus on increasing awareness of the dangers of distracted driving in construction zones and will run throughout the duration of project construction.

For more information on the 95 Express Lanes project, please visit www.95ExpressLanes.com. For additional information on the “Orange Cones. No Phones.” campaign, please visit www.orangeconesnophones.com.

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