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New Research Finds Distracted Driving on the Rise on I-95

Work Demands May Increase Distracted Driving; Texting Increases Chance of an Incident Three-Fold

Alexandria, VA – Today, Transurban-Fluor and AAA Mid-Atlantic released the second annual report on distracted drivers on I-95 in Northern Virginia, which found that despite major construction, distracted driving is a growing problem on the heavily traveled corridor. The report, part of Orange Cones. No Phones., a campaign focused on reducing distracted driving in the 95 Express Lanes construction zone, found that the number of frequent I-95 drivers likely to use their cell phone while driving has increased from 56 percent in 2013 to 62 percent in 2014.

Not only is distracted driving dangerous – it leads to accidents on the road. According to the report, based on a survey of 1,023 drivers who live in Northern Virginia and frequently travel the 95 Express Lanes project corridor, the number of distracted drivers on I-95 who have had a traffic incident or near-miss as a result of their behavior has increased from 24 percent in 2013 to 31 percent in 2014. Texting while driving is exceptionally dangerous – drivers who text while driving are three times more likely to experience a traffic incident or near miss versus non-texters.

“Distracted driving is dangerous under the best conditions – it is even more dangerous in a work zone,” said Aubrey Layne, Virginia Secretary of Transportation. “Transportation safety and the safety of those who report to work each day to improve Virginia’s infrastructure is our top priority. Drivers can make our roads significantly safer by taking one simple step – put down the phone while behind the wheel.”

Work demands may increase distracted driving. More than half (54 percent) of all distracted drivers on I-95 say they are at least occasionally responding to a work-related issue. These work responders are 10 percent more likely than non-work responders to have an incident or near miss behind the wheel. Work responders are also more likely than non-work responders to read texts, write texts and read/respond to emails. The top reasons distracted drivers respond to work-related issues on I-95 include:

- The belief that an immediate response is expected (31%),
- The desire to multitask/save time (27%)

- The need to check that the issue is not an emergency (17%)

Despite the dangers of distracted driving, just 18 percent of area drivers say their employer has a policy regarding the use of cell phones while driving. Recognizing that work demands are a leading cause of distracted driving on I-95, Transurban-Fluor and AAA Mid-Atlantic are working with area chambers of commerce to take a stand against distracted driving. To kick off the initiative, today, leadership from area chambers signed a pledge, promising to raise awareness about the dangers of distracted driving and discourage cell phone use while driving among their members.

“The issue of distracted driving in Virginia starts and ends with this: if you’re driving distracted, you’re dangerous to everyone on the road,” said Mahlon G. “Lon” Anderson, AAA Mid-Atlantic spokesman. “Employers must actively work to change their culture and discourage employees from driving distracted by changing policy. When it comes to distracted driving, being passive won’t work. Changing behavior to save lives demands aggressive action.”

The 95 Express Lanes corridor is currently an active construction zone with approximately 1,500 people reporting to work in the 29-mile project corridor each day. Despite major construction activities, just 18 percent of I-95 drivers have specifically opted to not read or write texts or emails in the I-95 construction zone. Only 11 percent say that they no longer talk on a cell phone in the construction zone.

“Driving distracted anytime, anywhere on the highway particularly in a work zone puts everyone at risk – from the motorist to highway workers to our public safety professionals,” said Major Lenmuel S. Terry, Deputy Director for the Bureau of Field Operations, Virginia State Police. “With our increased visibility within the I-95 work zone, if our troopers observe any unsafe driving behaviors then rest assured we will enforce the law. Eliminating distracted driving begins with the driver because no text message is worth someone’s life.”

During the remainder of 2014, crews will continue to conduct the work necessary to complete the 95 Express Lanes including installing and testing new overhead signs, tolling gantries and traffic management equipment. As there will be frequent lane closures and reduced shoulders this summer, drivers should plan to leave early or plan alternate routes to ensure as smooth a trip as possible. In order to safely complete the critical work required for the 95 Express Lanes, drivers should remember to:

- Slow down when traveling through the corridor as there are constricted shoulders and frequent lane closures
- Avoid cell phone distractions, as well as traditional distractions – such as driving while drowsy or eating in the car – to decrease your risk of getting in an accident

- Remember that your driving decisions impact everyone – including you as the driver, your occupants and your fellow drivers and workers in the field
- Be alert for work vehicles that enter and exit the construction zone from the left lane

“Safety is – and will remain – the partners’ top priority as we progress road construction,” said Walter J. Lewis III, Project Director, Fluor-Lane 95. “Drivers will need to remain focused as we finish construction and prepare to move into operations,” continued Kevin Ginnerty, Director of Project Delivery, Transurban. “When the 95 Express Lanes open, drivers will see new traffic patterns, new signage and new rules of the road, all of which will require their attention and focus.”

The 95 Express Lanes are on schedule to open in early 2015. Reversible like the HOV lanes today, the 95 Express Lanes will operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The 95 Express Lanes will use dynamic tolls to keep traffic flowing and provide a more predictable travel option on I-95 between Route 610 in Stafford County to just north of the Capital Beltway. Drivers with three or more people in the vehicle will be able to travel toll-free with an E-ZPass Flex set to HOV mode. Other drivers will need an E-ZPass to pay a toll for a faster, more reliable trip on I-95. For customized information on how to prepare and safely make the transition from HOV lanes to the 95 Express Lanes, drivers are encouraged to visit 95ExpressLanes.com/MakeAPlan.

The Orange Cones. No Phones. campaign was launched in 2009 to spread awareness of the dangers of driving distracted during construction of the 495 Express Lanes. The campaign transitioned to the I-95 corridor in the spring of 2013 to cut down on distracted driving in the 95 Express Lanes work zone. For additional information on the Orange Cones. No Phones. campaign, please visit www.orangeconesnophones.com.

About the 95 Express Lanes

The 95 Express Lanes are high occupancy toll (HOT) lanes that will operate on I-95 to provide travelers with faster, more predictable travel options. The project will add capacity and extend and improve the performance of the existing HOV lanes. The 95 Express Lanes will operate from I-95 near Garrisonville Road in Stafford County to the vicinity of Edsall Road on I-395 in Fairfax County (approximately 29 miles). Delivered through a public-private partnership between the Virginia Department of Transportation and Transurban-Fluor, the 95 Express Lanes will give drivers the freedom to control how and when they arrive at their destination. For more information, please visit 95ExpressLanes.com.

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