



By Bob Felt

Safety in numbers

More collaboration is needed in industry

About an hour south of our nation's capital, the historic former battle-grounds of Fredericksburg, Va., serve as the backdrop for the headquarters of a one-of-a-kind international roadway safety trade organization—the American Traffic Safety Services Association (ATSSA).

This assertive group of roadway-safety experts is guided by a four-word core purpose: to advance roadway safety.

Since 1969, ATSSA has made its mark in improving our transportation network through its members who develop and implement numerous roadway-safety solutions. Members manufacture, install and maintain devices such as guardrails, cable-median barriers, reflective materials, signs, pavement markings, numerous work-zone-safety devices and more efficient safety equipment and systems. And, the association itself boasts an arsenal of work-zone training courses that help save lives and lower our nation's fatality rate on roadways. ATSSA's goal is to move Toward Zero Deaths (TZD) even though some people think a goal of zero deaths is unachievable. As you probably know, the TZD goal is shared by many organizations across the country. These efforts should be applauded, because by pushing ourselves toward more ambitious goals, we can achieve greater results.

ATSSA's board of directors is committed to bringing together departments of transportation (DOTs), roadway owners, airports, municipalities, counties, universities, utility companies and the private sector at the same table to address the transportation-safety challenges that exist. Regarding the desire to see more infrastructure funding, many collective strides were made to increase (and almost double) SAFETEA-LU funding from \$1.3 billion to the \$2.4 billion in MAP-21.

Recently, ATSSA created a new partnership program, Connect the DOTs, to provide an avenue for collaboration among manufacturers, suppliers, consultants, expert trainers, government agencies (local/state/federal), universities

and other safety partners to better focus on TZD. This collaborative work improves access to information, provides more opportunities to partner with influential lawmakers and helps build a safer transportation network, saving lives and money.

"Why re-create the wheel when you can pull up a chair?" said Roger Wentz, ATSSA president and chief executive officer.

"We strongly encourage all of our safety partners to consider the value of working together on enhancing our nation's roadway-safety efforts."

To date, more than a dozen DOTs and numerous public agencies have combined efforts with ATSSA to move closer to the Toward Zero Deaths goal.

Societal costs surrounding fatalities are skyrocketing. Current estimates are \$9.1 million for the value of a statistical life (2012). Yet many people don't see the connection between safety investments and economic gain. To date, more than a dozen DOTs and numerous public agencies have combined efforts with ATSSA to move closer to the TZD goal, both saving lives and reducing societal costs.

"Researchers are seeing the need to cross-pollinate more, too," Wentz said. "The Texas [A&M] Transportation Institute and the University of Wisconsin-Madison have recently joined our fight. We're hoping to further expand our network of safety partners as our aging transportation system continues to see more opportunities for improvement."

Visit atssa.com and consider pulling up a chair. There's no need to re-create the wheel and work alone when the ATSSA roadway-safety model works well. **ST**

Felt is the associate director at ATSSA.