

Texas Strategic Action Plan for Motorcycles Supplement
Countermeasure Expansion for Impaired Riding

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Introduction

Texas has developed the *2016-2021 Texas Strategic Action Plan for Motorcycles* (Texas SAP for Motorcycles), which is a 5-year plan that has served as a guide for increasing motorcycle safety across the State. The plan conveys a broad set of motorcycle safety strategies and countermeasures that were informed by a diverse range of Texas motorcycle safety stakeholders. The plan includes 14 prioritized countermeasures, as identified through a series of focus groups and survey collection. The plan was developed in order to focus limited funding and resources to areas with the greatest opportunity to reduce motorcycle fatalities, injuries, and crashes in Texas.

During one of its 2017 meetings, the Texas Motorcycle Safety Coalition (TMSC) participated in a working session activity that further explored one of the aforementioned prioritized countermeasures. The working session focused on the countermeasure of communicating rider responsibility (e.g., not speeding, appropriate following distance, lane placement). The goal of the working session was to identify and build upon activities that would further advance the implementation of the countermeasure. Based on input received during the working session, Texas developed a *Supplement* to the Texas SAP for Motorcycles that focused on the countermeasure of communicating rider responsibility. The *Supplement* was distributed to motorcycle safety stakeholders with the goal of generating momentum at the grassroots level for communicating rider responsibility.

In 2018, a similar approach for developing a second *Supplement* to the Texas SAP for Motorcycles (this document) was explored. The Texas A&M Transportation Institute (TTI), alongside the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), co-host an annual Texas Motorcycle Safety Forum. The Forum is a 1-day event that brings motorcycle safety stakeholders together to discuss and exchange ideas for improving motorcycle safety and provides a much larger platform for involving and reaching a diverse range of motorcycle safety stakeholders. The 2018 Forum was held in Austin on March 29th.

Mitigating impaired riding by incorporating motorcycle-specific messaging into current anti-driving while intoxicated (DWI) campaigns was one of the prioritized countermeasures previously identified in the Texas SAP for Motorcycles. With 44% of fatal motorcycle fatalities involving alcohol and/or drugs in 2017, there was a strong emphasis on mitigating and preventing impaired riding at the Forum.¹

As part of that emphasis, Forum participants had the opportunity to choose from several discussion groups, each centering on a different angle of mitigating impaired riding. Discussion group topics included:

- Improving state efforts to mitigate impaired riding
- Improving motorcycle club and organization efforts to mitigate impaired riding
- Crafting effective anti-impaired riding messaging
- Changing motorcycle drinking culture

What follows below is a summary of the group discussion and suggestions that took place at the Forum. Each group had 60 minutes to discuss in small groups. During a subsequent session, TTI employees put

¹ Based on data pulled from the Texas Department of Transportation's Crash Records Information System as of April 9th, 2018.

together the information gathered during the discussions, then presented the summarized findings in front of the larger Forum audience towards the end of the day at the forum.

State Efforts to Mitigate Impaired Riding

The State is looked to, year after year, for its efforts to reduce motorcycle crashes and fatalities. There are several state agencies involved to work towards this common goal, but the two most common are the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) and Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT.) While each of the breakout groups were tasked with identifying agencies or organizations that could spearhead implementing activities aimed at preventing and reducing impaired riding, it is likely that most State efforts will be led by TxDPS, TxDOT, or a subcontracted agency.

In regards to improving State Efforts, group participants concluded that the course used for licensing, whether that is the Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) Course or another, such as the Total Control course, should include curriculum focused specifically on impairment. Starting around a decade ago, a riding course was required to be taken prior to obtaining a motorcycle license or endorsement. Since it's the only opportunity to educate all motorcyclists obtaining their license face-to-face, incorporating curriculum on the dangers of riding impaired seemed like an obvious "first step" in tackling the issue of impaired riding.

Additionally, stemming from that same idea of introducing a unit of impairment into the course used for licensing, the same impairment curriculum should be adopted as a component of *all* motorcycle classes offered by licensed state training operations. For those riders seeking to further educate themselves through higher-level courses, such as the MSF's Advanced Rider's Course, the participants felt that this was an important and serious enough issue to bear repeating in the more advanced courses as well.

Finally, the month of May has long been recognized as Motorcycle Awareness Month to call attention to the dangers that motorcyclists face on the roadway. Participants in this group believe that the State can use this month, which also coincides with the first half of the "riding season," to springboard into a higher concentration of public service announcements (PSAs), more signage and billboards, and outreach events. This month could also be used to start law enforcement initiatives that aid in reducing motorcycle crashes, such as the Selective Traffic Enforcement Program, also known as STEP.

Motorcycle Club and Organization Efforts to Mitigate Impaired Riding

Most motorcycle riders at the forum agreed that one of the key factors to reducing impaired riding is changing the culture and its ties between drinking and riding. While changing drinking culture was a separate topic discussed by another group (last section), it has ties with every other discussion group, but most notably, how it is ingrained into motorcycle clubs and organizations.

First and foremost, the participants found it necessary to have a top-down strategy. This requires the leadership of the groups to "walk the walk" and set a good example for the rest of the club by not drinking and riding. Establishing a clear set of rules and expectations is a start, but also taking it a step further by adding 'teeth' – such as club fines and other penalties, which could lead up to complete removal from the club. Groups should establish, or continue, policies of no drinking amongst prospective club members. Prospects should be seen as "on-duty," and one doesn't drink while on the "job."

Secondly, the participants felt it would be appropriate to conduct more research to investigate the root cause of excessive drinking, as it pertains specifically to motorcyclists. More accurate information on the causes would lead to more effective countermeasures to address those causes. With that, one of the easiest ways to separate drinking and riding among clubs and organizations is simply to not host events or rides that stop or end at establishments that serve alcohol, effectively reducing the availability and temptation of drinking while riding. Instead, focus on events that would be considered more family appropriate.

Ultimately, this group felt it necessary to come up with a motto. The motto was developed by the participants to encompass all of their ideas into one simple notion, and that is: *"You have the RESPONSIBILITY to yourself and your club/community and it starts with yourself."* This motto illustrates the fact that clubs and organizations are only as good as the members within, and so it puts the responsibility on the members to represent their organizations appropriately.

Crafting Effective Anti-Impaired Riding Messaging

Developing effective anti-impairment messaging can be tricky for a multitude of reasons, but the primary reasons that stuck out for this group were how to measure effectiveness, what the message itself should be, and also, how the vast amount of mediums for communicating messages can be utilized to their individual potentials. Participants delved into all of these issues in their discussion.

The measurement of effectiveness can be defined in many different ways. How many people did the message reach? Of the people reached, how many were the intended target audience? Did the message have the desired effect (in this instance, did it shift behavior to stop drinking and riding)? Is the cost-to-benefit ratio acceptable? These are among the most pressing questions that must be answered to evaluate the effectiveness of messaging.

Participants did not discuss what the actual anti-impairment riding message should be, citing that task should be left to marketing firms, however, there were topics they felt would be beneficial. The first topic ties back to what the 'Clubs and Organizations' group stated in their motto, and that was personal accountability. To illustrate that, this group suggested effective messaging would include the effect of any amount of blood alcohol content (BAC) and alcohol's negating impact on riding skills. Also, the vulnerability of motorcyclists should be highlighted. In addition to personal accountability, the participants also mentioned the promotion of brotherhood and the responsibility of looking out for one's fellow motorcyclists by encouraging them not to drink and ride. The group suggested promoting the mentality of "one (drink) and done." It should be noted, however, that a study completed by the University of Minnesota on the *"effects of alcohol impairment on motorcycle riding skills"*, found "significant levels of intoxication were evident in the lowest alcohol condition (BAC .02),"² which leads to the belief that the safest option is riding sober.

To conclude, the discussion went to the topic of distributing messages across different communication mediums. Social media was at the top of the list because it's easy to disseminate information, low-cost, and can be shared to a more specific audience (in this case, motorcyclists), as compared to other

² https://www.msf-usa.org/downloads/imsc2013/Oct16_Session2-Ward-Motorcycle_Safety_and_Alcohol_PAPER.pdf

mediums. However, the biggest drawback is not everyone participates in social media. TV, billboards, and radio advertising were also mentioned, but it can be hard to target a specific audience and can be expensive. Materials, such as fact sheets, can be distributed by way of clubs. Such items can be found on websites like www.looklearnlive.org, but still might be limited in scope since it might not reach independent riders that do not associate with clubs or organizations – but is another viable, low-cost option. Signs in bars, specifically restrooms, were also mentioned. Finally, it was concluded in this group, in addition to the State Efforts group, that messaging about impaired riding should go into the curriculum for the Basic Rider’s Course from the MSF.

Changing Motorcycle Drinking Culture

To begin with, this group identified the current motorcycle drinking culture. All participants were in agreement that “bikes and bars go together.” When asked to elaborate about why the perception persists, participants responded there’s “peer pressure to drink,” and that bars offered a “positive atmosphere” for motorcyclists to gather. Many participants commented that bars are one of a few establishments that seem to openly welcome riders, especially in large numbers. Others suggested that drinking is a part of any “social model,” that is, when any group of people meet up to hang out, they’re likely to meet up and drink.

Participants discussed that riders often participate in poker runs or other types of group rides. Poker runs are organized events where riders visit a certain number of checkpoints (usually 5) along an established route. At each checkpoint, the rider draws a poker card or chip. And like a game of poker, the person with the best hand at the end is deemed the winner. Checkpoints are typically held at bars because, as mentioned previously, they openly welcome riders. When asked if poker runs and other “excuses to ride” could be held at locations other than bars (i.e., bike nights without alcohol), participants agreed that they could, but acknowledged there’d likely be a smaller event turnout.

Participants suggested that there are some actions that motorcycle clubs and organizations can take to discourage riding impaired, including reminding members before organized rides that they’re representatives of their clubs, imposing drink limits, designating a sober driver, bringing trailers to securely store motorcycles overnight, developing an easily accessible list of tow companies with experience towing motorcycles, and physically taking an impaired rider’s keys away. Other suggestions included educating bartenders how to read patches to ask for help from club members. However, others argued that it was a better solution for a fellow club member to “cut someone off” than for an unknown bartender. The idea of club “self-policing” seemed to gain the most traction; however, this approach does not reach riders who are unaffiliated with motorcycle clubs and organizations.

Finally, participants agreed that more education and messaging targeted at both motorcyclists and motorists was needed. Education and messaging targeted at motorcyclists was recognized as necessary given the high percentage of fatal motorcycle crashes involving impairment. Participants suggested that the State should develop anti-DWI messaging targeted at motorcyclists – not just a general anti-DWI message targeted at all motorists. Education and messaging efforts could be shared via social media, local chapter meetings, through driver and motorcycle safety education training programs, and even partnering with local bar establishments.

Conclusion

The goal of these discussion groups was to utilize the wealth and breadth of knowledge stemming from the attendees of the forum to combat one of the main issues plaguing the motorcycle riding community, which is impaired riding. Gleaning information from our ‘boots on the ground’ – the riders who may deal with this issue on a regular basis – is imperative to not only understanding the root of the problem, but to find effective ways of combatting the issue. This forum is unique in that Texas is was one of the only states to hold an annual safety conference that is specific to motorcycle safety. This makes the utilization of the diverse people involved – ranging from dealers, to law enforcement, to engineers and researchers, to club members, independents, and rider coaches³ – an easy choice to aid in identifying details of specific issues that involve riders. The information gathered from these group discussions will help Texas move forward “on the Road to Zero.”

³ From evaluations completed at the 2018 Texas Motorcycle Safety Forum