

NCHRP 20-68A – “US Domestic Scan Program”

Scan 14-03 Successful Approaches for the Development of an Organization-wide Safety Culture in Transportation Agencies

Improving transportation-system safety is an important national goal pursued by government transportation agencies and others. New technology and regulatory action can contribute to reducing transportation fatalities, injuries, and property damage, but experience in many fields has shown that more fundamental changes in culture are needed as well. Road users and organizations with a role in transportation safety implicitly accept the levels of risk inherent in the system. Changing the culture entails enhancing everyone’s understanding of what these risk levels are, how their actions influence their own and others’ risks, and actions they can take to reduce risk in general. Large organizations in a variety of business areas have learned that changing their own organization’s safety culture is an important step toward improving safety for their customers as well as themselves, and that such change can yield a range of benefits. Discussions of traffic safety culture are becoming more frequent among transportation safety professionals, but clear, practical paths forward for highway agencies have yet to be developed. One promising approach is to begin at home, with the safety culture of the agency itself.

The objective of this scan is to examine organizations that have successfully designed and implemented strategic safety-culture transformation programs. The scan team will examine research and experience with strategic safety culture transformation programs that could be applied to enhance highway safety.

Specifically, the team should examine:

- The characteristics of a strong organizational safety culture;
- How organizational safety culture differs by type of organization;
- Examples, within the transportation industry and beyond, of successful initiatives to change organizational culture;
- Examples of specific Department of Transportation and State Highway Safety Office initiatives to change traffic safety culture;
- How improvements in safety culture can be sustained.

Changing safety culture is a complex challenge and, while individual initiatives managed by specific departments or addressing specific issues contribute to changing the safety culture, it is necessary to develop a process for changing values and attitudes so that safety is a factor in every transportation decision, whether personal or organizational. The scan may entail discussions with insurance companies and private- and public-sector organizations concerned with internal and customer safety as well as with public transportation agencies. This scan will result in information for highway safety stakeholders, including state DOTs, on how to assess and transform traffic safety culture within their organization and among their road-users customers. It is envisioned that the scan report may include executive-level briefing material on organizational safety culture as applied to transportation organizations and “getting-started” guidance for DOT staff to begin identifying opportunities for creating or improving a traffic safety culture within the DOTs.

Original Scan Proposal Title(s): Development of an Executive-Level Primer for Improving Organizational Traffic Safety Culture

Scan Team Membership

Execution Schedule

Milestone	Anticipated Date
Chairs and Team Members Identified	4/14
Desk Scan Completed	7/14
Prescan Meeting Held	7/14
Scan Conducted	11/14
Draft PowerPoint submitted by SME	12/14
Draft Report Delivered to NCHRP and Panel	3/15
Final Report Delivered to NCHRP	6/15

Estimated Scan Cost: \$150,000

Anticipated Duration: 1 weeks (type 3 scan)

Last Reviewed/Revised January 8, 2014