

ROAD COMMISSION **for OAKLAND COUNTY**

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RCOC LEADER SPEAKS ABOUT REDUCING TRAFFIC FATALITIES AT NATIONAL CONFERENCE; HIGHLIGHTS RCOC SAFETY RECORD

Beverly Hills, Mich. — Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) Managing Director Dennis Kolar was one of the featured speakers at this week’s “Toward Zero Deaths” speaker series at the Transportation Research Board (TRB) Annual Meeting in Washington DC.

TRB is a division of the National Research Council of the United States which serves as an independent adviser to the president, Congress and federal agencies on scientific and technical questions of national importance. Kolar was asked to share information about RCOC’s safety culture, which helped move the county from being well above the national average for traffic fatalities to having the lowest rate in the state and well below the statewide and national rates.

Kolar was one of six panelists participating in the session Monday (Jan. 11) at the TRB Annual Meeting at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington DC.

Kolar explained that in 1967 Oakland County had a traffic-fatality rate of 6.8 deaths per 100 million miles of vehicle travel. That was higher than either the statewide or national rates. Because of the high rate, the Road Commission and others in the county began to focus on crash data to identify ways to lower that number.

Those efforts included helping to found the Traffic Improvement Association of Michigan (TIA), which is a non-profit organization that collects and analyzes traffic crash data. It remains one of the only organizations in the state to compile and analyze crash data, which RCOC now relies upon heavily to identify and remedy areas of safety concern.

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Subsequently, in 1978, RCOC declared safety to be its official number-one priority. “Since that time,” Kolar explained, “safety has been the most critical factor in identifying, selecting and designing road improvement projects.”

He pointed out that safety concerns also came to permeate virtually everything else the Road Commission does, from road maintenance to sign and signal management to road design techniques and much more. “We have truly created a safety culture, where our employees are very committed to the concept of ensuring the safety of our customers – the public using our roads,” Kolar stated.

Today, Oakland County has a traffic fatality rate of 0.45 deaths per 100 million miles of travel -- less than half either the state or national rate. “We will do whatever we can to ensure our roads are as safe as possible,” the managing director explained. “In the past, we have purchased homes and businesses – and even a church -- when we needed more room to straighten a curve or add lanes; reduced hills to improve sight distance; and reconfigured intersections to eliminate safety problems.”

Kolar added that if Oakland County still had a traffic-fatality rate equal to the national fatality rate, 80 more people would die every year on roads in the county.

RCOC has also been recognized by the Federal Highway Administration for its leadership in traffic safety. “There is nothing more important to us than the safety of the motorists and pedestrians using our roads,” Kolar said.

While in Washington DC for the TRB Annual Meeting, Kolar also met with Oakland County’s representatives in the U.S. House and Senate, presenting the need for more federal road funding.

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