

To: Cape Cod Joint Transportation Committee
From: Cape Cod Commission
Date: March 6, 2009

Subject: Obstacles to Accurate Crash Reporting and the Importance of Improvement

Incomplete or inaccurate crash reporting may lead to a missed opportunity of funds for a project. Geographic representation of crash incidents can be very valuable to a town or region. The Massachusetts Highway Department (MassHighway) has been working statewide to geolocate all crashes reported to the Registry of Motor Vehicles. Unfortunately, MassHighway has only been able to locate slightly over 80% of reported crashes. Only 66% of Barnstable County's crashes were located for years 2005 and 2006. In an effort to improve the data, some Regional Planning Agencies are attempting to manually geolocate the crashes that were not mapped in the first attempt.

At the end of November 2008, the Cape Cod Commission (CCC) was sent 892 non-geolocated crash records to be individually investigated. The crash records spanned the period from January 1 to November 11, 2008. Of those 892 crash records, 534 were able to be located through manual inspection (60%).

Although more than half of the non-geolocated crashes could be identified through manual inspection, still 40% of the crashes lacked enough information to be located. MassHighway does not estimate crash locations, so these unlocated crashes will not be evidence for project funding without further information.

Obstacles to Accurate Crash Reporting

Most important when filling out crash reports is to be as detailed as possible. The following are tips to assure the record is properly located:

- Include the street name *and* route number (many routes have multiple street names, and some streets are part of multiple routes)
- If two roads intersect at more than one location, specify the intersection you are identifying (e.g. "Rt 28 / Crowell Rd northern intersection")
- If reporting an interchange ramp, specify on or off; if reporting a rest area, specify enter or exit
- Be sure to use the correct complete name of the road (e.g. Barnstable has both a Willow St and a Willow Ave)
- Keep in mind the person trying to locate the crash may not be familiar with the town (sometimes landmarks are hard to spot on aerials)
- If the crash did not occur at an intersection, estimate the distance from the next nearest road (and specify from which direction)

Unreported Crashes

For a variety of reasons, not every crash is included in the RMV reporting system. Since the change in reporting methodology around 2002, many towns saw their crash numbers fall by as much as 50%. While this could be indicative of safer roads on Cape Cod, a different theory suggests there are errors in the reporting process.

Importance of Improvement

Geolocating crashes is an effective method used in identifying high crash areas. Better crash data will lead to better analysis, the most accurate identification of problem areas, and the deployment of appropriate safety improvements. Programs like the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) depend on a data-driven process like crash record geolocating. **Incomplete or inaccurate crash reporting may lead to a missed opportunity of funds for a project.** These records are used to bolster an argument for the funding.

As of October 2008, 68 cities and towns have been submitting crash reports to the RMV electronically. Four of the towns are located on Cape Cod (Brewster, Falmouth, Orleans, Sandwich). Taking advantage of this technology reduces the potential for erroneous information to be included in the RMV's computer database.

Please pass this information along to all relevant parties.