

The Problem

(Written by Grant County Executive Assistant Rich Donaldson)

One out of 100 children born this year will die violently in a highway crash during his or her lifetime. Seventy of those children born this year will be injured in a highway crash during their lifetimes.

These sobering statistics were announced at a two day Road Safety Audit (RSA) class held at the Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) building in Tulsa. As a grandfather of eight (soon to be ten) grandchildren, I found these facts to be chilling.

The RSA class was sponsored through the Tribal Technical Assistance Program (TTAP) with Craig Allred as the instructor. Mr. Allred, an employee of the Federal Highway Safety Administration is on the road approximately 43 weeks out of the year instructing local, state and federal jurisdictions on how to improve road safety. Additionally, he and his team are called into areas where a high number of fatalities or injuries have occurred. This team investigates and delivers formal reports suggesting how to curtail or stop further incidents from happening.

What does this class have to do with Grant County? Does it even apply to our rural, local roads? Would an RSA have a place in the building and maintenance of the local roads? The Board of Commissioners had the same questions and more. I was asked to attend the class and find out the answers to these questions and bring back information.

At first I was extremely skeptical. When asked by the class facilitator what my expectations of the class were, I replied that I wanted to see how a program like this would fit into a low funded rural area. What I found out, surprised me.

RSA's even in rural areas such as Grant County can be a valuable tool for local government road professionals in making our roads safer. The benefits of conducting RSA's allow County employees to consistently look for and suggest numerous low cost safety improvements on our local roads.

An RSA is a formal safety performance examination of an existing or future road or intersection by a multidisciplinary team. A team consisting of people with a fresh set of eyes, having no political agenda, with a myriad of view perspectives (motorists, bicyclists, pedestrian, tractor driver, sports car, semi-truck) looking first, for simple solutions.

RSA teams study a roadway, intersection or area using these various perspectives, uncover the root cause and make suggestions on how to correct or improve the situation.

Road Safety is made up of four building blocks.

1. Geometry including the curve, gradient, cross section, clearance sight distance and clear zone.

2. Operations including congestion, signal operation, speeding, queuing and turning movements.
3. Road Users including motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians.
4. Environment including weather and lighting conditions.

RSA's take into consideration all four of these items, addressing them one by one and determining if any of these factors can be improved.

The RSA team takes into consideration these building blocks of safety and determines if any one or all of these factors can be improved and thereby increase the safety of the roadway or intersection.

One of the basic tenets of the class was that safety affects mobility. The more unsafe the road is, the slower the traffic will proceed. The result is hesitant road users, improving the chance for injury and accident to occur.

Many of the suggestions that were shown during the class had nothing to do with redesigning roadways or building bigger, newer roads. Most of the improvements and suggestions dealt with signage and painting. These are low cost improvements that save lives and make our roadways safer.

These low cost improvements result in a Crash Reduction Factor (CFR). Signage's such as curve chevron signs, sharp curve ahead, reduce speed, delineators along bridges and culverts, oversized stop signs and stop ahead signs result in 18 to 40 percent reduction in crashes.

The Grant County Commissioners are committed to making our roads safer for their constituency. RSA's are just one more tool to be used towards the improvements of our local county roads, intersections and bridges.

With funding in high demand and short supply, RSA's make sense. The good news is that implementations of RSA suggestions generally don't require expenditures of a large sum of money.

For more information and benefits of RSA's , visit the RSA website:
<http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/rsa>

If you have concerns or suggestions regarding the roads in Grant County, please feel free to contact the Executive Assistant Rich Donaldson at 580.395.2214 or the County Commissioner for your District.

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