

Public gives “Thumbs Up” to ODOT’s management of work zones, but there’s room for improvement

Highway construction and maintenance operations almost always occur in the presence of traffic. In order to preserve the Oregon system of highways and bridges, impacts to the public are inevitable. This is especially problematic on primary highways where high traffic volumes make construction and maintenance activities difficult to undertake without affecting local communities and the traveling public.

ODOT is committed to providing a safe, reliable and predictable trip through its work zones. As a tool for making positive change, ODOT undertook research to determine the public’s perceptions, values and priorities when they travel through work zones. The study results are available in a report entitled “Assessing Public Inconvenience In Highway Work Zones,” published in June 2002 by the ODOT Research Group. Some of the highlights from that report are presented here.

Methodology

Researchers conducted a series of focus groups and surveys to investigate highway users’ views and their priorities relating to highway work zones. In addition, a literature review looked at how other state and federal transportation agencies have addressed the issue of reducing inconvenience to highway users in work zones.

Six focus groups were assembled, consisting of: (1) two groups of general motorists; (2) one group of school bus drivers; (3) a group of business owners; (4) one group of fire and emergency service personnel; and (5) a group of truck drivers from an interstate trucking company.



Two surveys were carried out as part of the study. The first one, with over 2,000 motorists, was stratified by ODOT Region. The other was a survey of 448 truck drivers, which included an on-site survey of truck drivers at two highway rest areas, and a telephone survey.

Findings

One of the most frustrating aspects of work zones was not seeing workers present when signs indicated “Workers Ahead.” Greater enforcement of speeds was cited by all groups as an essential change needed in work zones. The public also wanted better work zone markings for temporary lanes, lane changes, and merging zones. Nighttime visibility and problems seeing construction personnel at night were identified as work zone issues.

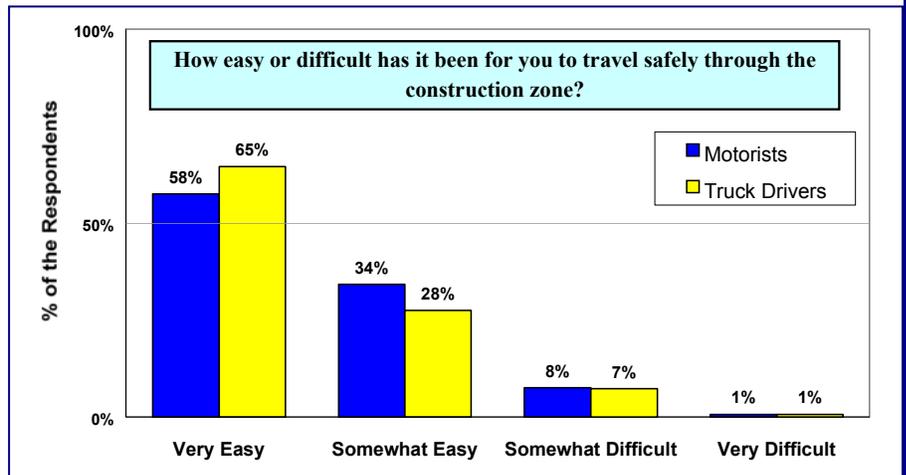
The surveys showed an overall positive response to ODOT’s management of highway work zones. In Regions 3, 4, and 5, motorists’ views of acceptable delays closely matched what they were actually experiencing. Regions 1 and 2 experienced longer delays, partially due to increased traffic congestion.

Motorists ranked speed enforcement in work zones as the most important area to improve in four of the five regions. In Region 1, the need to improve nighttime visibility was the number one priority.

requirements for the stopping and starting of large trucks. Truck drivers felt the glare from construction lighting (light plants, rotor beams, headlights, etc.) was the principal inconvenience within work zones.

The majority of people surveyed did not actively seek information about construction work zones prior to traveling. Advance information was primarily found in newspapers, electronic media (radio and television), and telephone calls to ODOT. Internet usage to get construction updates was very low throughout the state. Unlike motorists, truck drivers rely heavily on CB radios and construction signs as primary sources of information about highway work zones.

To improve work zones, truck drivers suggested changes in flagging, including increasing the alertness, visibility and location of flaggers, as well as making them aware of unique



ODOT's Standing Committee on Construction has formed a Task Group to review the findings from this research. They will make recommendations for changes to ODOT work zone practices prior to the 2003 construction season.

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