



HOWARD MARKLEIN

STATE SENATOR • 17TH SENATE DISTRICT

Capitol Update By Senator Howard Marklein June 17, 2016

Keeping Our Minds On the Road

Summer is a great time to travel all over the state of Wisconsin. Whether you are traveling to visit family, attend a festival, paddle our waters or camp with your family, many of us will take off in the family car to journey across the state.

Depending on your route, you may discover some rough roads in parts of our state, especially in the rural communities of the 17th Senate District. I want you to know that my mind is still on the condition of our roads and the funding needed to maintain our infrastructure. I understand, I share your frustrations and I hear you.

During the last budget cycle, I advocated for increasing transportation revenues and for finding a long-term solution to the transportation funding issues we face. Despite some recent announcements by the Department of Transportation (DOT), I believe that the Joint Finance Committee (JFC) will have very thorough and thoughtful discussions about these issues next winter and I will continue to fight for a sustainable solution that enables our rural communities to have safe, efficient infrastructure. We need to do things differently. Borrowing is not the answer.

With that said, it is important to remember that there are a couple of new laws that were passed during the last legislative session that impact travel and transportation. As many of you know, the speed limit increased to 70 miles per hour on some roads. We also made it illegal to use a hand-held cell phone in a construction zone and now require all drivers to turn on their headlights during times of low visibility.

Speed Limit Increase to 70 mph - A year ago, the Department of Transportation (DOT) installed 470 new 70 mph speed limit signs on 726 miles of rural interstate after Act 19 was signed into law. The speed limit was increased on roads that do not have at-grade crossings, such as Interstate 90/94.

The Wisconsin State Patrol has observed that most drivers have conservatively increased their speeds in response to the change in limits. For example, a driver who drove 73 mph when the limit was 65 mph is now driving 76 mph. They are not increasing their speed by as large a margin. Most people have a certain level of comfort while driving and most people will not exceed the speed at which they are comfortable.

According to the DOT, the traffic fatality rate in Wisconsin, overall, has gone up this year, but it has not been on the roads where the speed limit increased. In fact, a quick analysis tells us that the increase in fatalities has occurred on rural roads and more accidents are involving motorcycles and bicycles than they have in the past.

Despite the change in speed limit on some roads, the mission of the State Patrol has remained the same; to enforce traffic laws that help to keep every safe on our roads. With the increase in speed, it is especially important to remember that the left lane is designed for passing, while the middle and right lanes are for driving.

It is also imperative that we respect the "Move Over" law. This law requires drivers to shift lanes or slow down in order to provide a "safety zone" for a squad car, ambulance, fire truck, tow truck, utility vehicle, or highway maintenance vehicle that is stopped on the side of a road with its warning lights flashing. Violations of this law can result in a \$263 citation. Observing these guidelines increases the safety and efficiency of all of our roadways.

Hand-held Cell Phones in Construction Zones - The legislature also passed a law this session to make it illegal to use a hand-held cell phone while driving in a construction zone. This law goes into effect in October 2016 and the fines range from \$20-40 for first offenses and \$50-100 for subsequent offenses within a year.

Start practicing safety now! Beginning in October, law enforcement will issue tickets for drivers seen talking on a hand-held cell phone while driving through a construction zone. But you don't have to wait! If you avoid using your cell phone in construction zones or opt for hands-free operation now, you won't have to change bad habits come October. And you will be giving our state's construction crews a safer environment all summer.

Headlights in Inclement Weather - While many of our cars automatically turn-on our headlights at night, the law now states that we must turn our headlights on during times of limited visibility. Limited visibility means you can't see something 500-ft away, which is a little less than two high school football fields.

Law enforcement is currently issuing warnings for failure to turn-on headlights during inclement weather situations. Beginning October 1, 2016, they will be able to ticket motorists up to \$160 for failure to comply with the law.

Since the law went into effect in March, the State Patrol has issued 1,695 headlight warnings during low visibility and nighttime hours. The Department has not itemized these warnings for times of low visibility yet, but the State Patrol, and other law enforcement, has always encouraged drivers to operate headlights to increase safety and visibility while driving in any sort of weather. Operating headlights during times of limited visibility and inclement weather is especially important to protect you and other drivers.

Headlights help you to see what is in front of you, but they also help other drivers to see you as you approach and as they approach you. Remember, when you do not have headlights on, your taillights are not on. Even if you have day-running lights, drivers approaching you from behind may not see you until they are right on top of you. It may be an extra step to turn on headlights when the weather is poor, but it could make a big difference for your safety and the safety of other drivers who share the road with you.

As you travel throughout the state this summer, keep these new laws in mind and feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns. Again, my mind is on our roads too and I appreciate your input as I work on ways to improve the safety, efficiency and experience on all Wisconsin roads.

For more information and to connect with me, visit my website <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/senate/17/marklein> and subscribe to my weekly E-Update by sending an email

to Sen.Marklein@legis.wisconsin.gov. Do not hesitate to call 800-978-8008 if you have input, ideas or need assistance with any state-related matters.

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