

Vision 2001: Now is the time to embark on the path to tomorrow

While there is a long way to go, road safety professionals have seen the future and it is safer than the past

Last week I had the pleasure of spending several days in our nation's capitol, attending Transport Canada's *Road Safety Vision 2001* conference.

Now, I'm quite sure that many of you are thinking you would LOVE to attend something like that. What could be more exciting than a group of road safety professionals hanging together for a weekend, right?

Actually, I'm the first one to admit that not every conference is informative, interesting or innovative. But, I must say that this one was all three, and then some. Every once in a while, it pays for people in my profession to get together, recharge and realize that we are part of a much larger plan. One person isn't necessarily going to change a nation, but several of us just might. That's what this conference was all about.

I'd like to share a bit of what I learned with you.

Transport Canada has set a rather lofty goal for itself. Canada's road safety vision is a national undertaking



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aimed at making Canada's roads the safest in the world (as the saying goes, go big or go home.) Officially launched in 1996, *Vision 2001* is a partnership between all levels of government and public and private stakeholders.

Time to go BIG

Vision 2001 has four main initiatives in its scope:

- raise public awareness of road safety issues
- improve communication, cooperation and collaboration among road safety agencies
- toughen enforcement measures
- improve national road safety data quality and collection

Just in case you haven't read much of

my column before, let me reiterate: this is a *monumental* undertaking. Think about it: the goal is to motivate people to care about road safety issues, motivate large public and private bodies to share and play nice together, motivate police forces to dedicate more hours to traffic safety in spite of facing harsh budget and staff cuts, and build a national database of solid road safety information—when there are some provinces in Canada that don't even track accident statistics. Have fun!

It's monumental, but it's also critical to making significant change. Did you know that Canada is home to 900,000 kilometres of road ways, 18 million registered vehicles and almost 21 million licenced drivers? We are among the most mobile people on earth, but we pay dearly for that freedom. Last year, nearly 3,000 Canadians died on our roads, and another 222,000 were injured. The bottom line is staggering: collectively, the cost to our already taxed health care system is at least \$10 *billion* per year.

Even though these numbers are depressing, I'm pleased to say that they

are an improvement over what we started with in the early '70s. Thanks to a combination of factors, including seatbelt and impaired driving initiatives, tougher vehicle safety standards and improvements in road infrastructure and emergency medical services, the number of traffic fatalities has been cut in half. What makes this achievement even more remarkable is that, at the same time, the number of vehicles on Canadian roads has almost *doubled*.

Getting better all the time

In a profession where success is measured literally one percentage point at a time, that's an incredible statistic.

In fact, ever since 1996, when *Vision 2001* was first launched, we've seen consistent improvement. In spite of the growing numbers of vehicles and drivers on the roads I mentioned above, the number of road users killed or injured has decreased by four per cent and 13 per cent respectively.

Part of this success can be attributed to Canada's approach to road safety. We operate within a collaborative

framework; that is to say, road safety is the responsibility of the federal, provincial and municipal levels of government. The federal government is responsible for setting motor vehicle safety standards, as well as interprovincial commercial vehicle safety fitness. Provincial and municipal governments are responsible for highway maintenance, commercial vehicle operations, driver and vehicle licencing and local road safety initiatives.

Over the next column (or maybe two) I'll go into greater detail about what Canada's doing to support *Vision 2001*, including how Manitoba is contributing to the cause. I'll also be spending some time talking about what the rest of the world is doing about road safety. Until next week, be **RoadWise**.

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