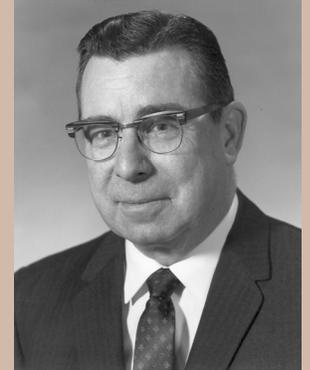


Researcher

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Francis C. "Frank" Turner

Turner inducted into Hall of Honor

The late Francis C. "Frank" Turner, known by transportation professionals as the "Father of the Interstate Highway System," was the first person inducted into the Texas Transportation Hall of Honor on March 22. Officials of The Texas A&M University System and representatives of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in Washington, D.C., took part in the induction ceremony, as well as several members of Turner's family.

The Dallas/Ft. Worth native graduated from Texas A&M University in 1929 and joined the Bureau of Public Roads, which later became the FHWA. He would spend his 43-year career with those organizations.

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Double or nothing

Researchers recommend changes to work zone double-fine law

Since January 1998, Texas motorists can receive double fines for speeding in work zones. Yet Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) researchers recently discovered the new double-fine law resulted in little change in traffic speed — and they determined why.

Texas experiences the largest number of annual work zone fatalities in the country. Despite implementation of the work zone

law, Texas had 125 work zone fatalities in 1998, over 40 more than in 1997. The double-fine law was designed to increase the incentive for motorists to slow down in work zones, thus increasing safety for workers who maintain and improve Texas roads. Why has this law, aimed directly at work zone violators, failed to find its target?

By studying the law, moni-

toring the work sites and surveying law enforcement personnel, TTI researchers uncovered the answer.

Fast Facts

Researchers conducted speed studies at 10 work zone construction projects before and after implementation of the work zone double-fine law. These sites

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Work Zone

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ranged from two-lane, two-way highways to multilane freeways.

The studies indicated that the double-fine law had little effect on traffic speed characteristics in the work zones examined. Average speeds after law implementation, relative to before-law conditions, were statistically unchanged at six of the 10 sites. Changes in average speeds ranged from a 4 mph decrease at two sites to a 6 mph increase at another. At seven of the 10 sites examined, more than

nel have difficulty establishing whether workers are actually present at the exact time and location of the speeding violation. Unless an officer has recently passed through a work zone, he or she cannot be sure workers are on site. Discussions with transportation and law enforcement officials outside Texas highlighted similar difficulties associated with double-fine laws that require workers to be present.

Another difficulty is that justices of the peace, who determine fines for citations issued in their jurisdictions, have wide latitude in setting issued fines for individual violations. The law raises only the range of fines available

initially intended,” Ullman comments. “With changes to the law and an implementation plan that makes the best use of enforcement resources in work zone areas, the law will ultimately improve driver behavior and reduce speeds in maintenance and construction areas. Those slower speeds will increase safety for both workers and motorists.”

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Related publication: *Work Zone Traffic Legislation in Texas*. TTI Report 1720-3. Gerald Ullman et al. December 1999. Work Zone Safety Clearinghouse web site: <http://wzsafety.tamu.edu>.



“We believe our recommendations will help the work zone law achieve the benefit initially intended.”
— Gerald Ullman

two-thirds of the motorists exceeded the posted speed limit.

“Our results weren’t terribly surprising,” says Jerry Ullman, program manager of the Traffic Operations Program at TTI. “We’d had conversations with enforcement personnel and others that indicated work zone enforcement of the new law was not heavily emphasized. Without enforcement, a law just isn’t going to have much of an impact.”

It’s the Law

All but four states have passed laws which increase fines for traffic violations in work zones. TTI researchers reviewed and studied work zone laws passed in other states as well as in Texas.

“If we’re serious about what we’re saying in these work zone laws, then we need to establish higher levels of enforcement to achieve compliance. There are a number of difficulties in enforcing the law as it currently stands,” notes Ullman.

The Texas work zone law implemented January 1, 1998, doubles the minimum and maximum fines applicable to traffic violations that occur in work zones where workers are present. Because of the dynamics associated with work activities, law enforcement person-

nel to officials — it does not specify a mandatory increase for specific instances of work zone violations. A comparison of citation frequency, disposition methods, and fines levied before and after implementation of the law found few changes.

Speeding toward a Safe Future

Despite the recent findings, TTI researchers emphasize the merit of work zone legislation. Based on the results of the study, they believe the state’s current law can be improved through four changes:

- eliminate the worker-presence requirement,
- increase the minimum fines for a violation cited within a work zone,
- modify the law to still require a fine or greater court costs for those attempting to have the ticket dismissed through a defensive driving course, and
- establish legislation to allow a reduced regulatory speed limit to be posted in certain maintenance zones.

“We believe our recommendations will help the work zone law achieve the benefit

