

Operation Reduce Our Drive time Every Day (R.O.D.E.) 2015 Washington State Patrol

Summary

Operation Reduce Our Drive time Every Day (R.O.D.E.) was initiated to address the problem of increasing traffic congestion and commute times between the cities of Everett, Seattle, Tacoma and Bellevue in Western Washington.

The primary goal of Operation R.O.D.E. was to educate the public on how they could participate in reducing traffic congestion and thereby decreasing commute/drive times. Washington State, like many areas of the country, is dealing with increased traffic congestion on its roadways. Traffic congestion on the Everett-Seattle-Tacoma and Bellevue freeways continues to increase each year and is most prevalent on weekdays during “rush hour.” These increased commute times can lead to road rage and unsafe driving behaviors as drivers become impatient and frustrated. It also has an impact on the economy as time correlates to money for many businesses.

The plan was to use various sources to educate the public on how they could help improve traffic flow and decrease congestion. This combined with continued prompt action by Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and the Washington State Patrol (WSP) to calls for service in the area would decrease commute time during “rush hour.”

Commute times would be checked throughout the year to evaluate the success of the program and a final analysis would be completed after one year.

Description

A. Scanning

Washington State, like many areas of the country, is dealing with increased traffic congestion on its roadways. Traffic congestion on the freeways between the major cities of Everett, Seattle, Tacoma and Bellevue continues to increase each year and is most prevalent on weekdays during “rush hour.”

These increased commute times can lead to road rage and unsafe driving behaviors as drivers become impatient and frustrated with the congestion. It also has an impact on the economy as time correlates to money for many businesses. This time spent in traffic congestion also was having an impact on the quality of life for those commuting by increasing their work day and decreasing their personal time.

B. Analysis

In the long term, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is working on increasing roadway capacity in certain areas, these efforts will take many years to complete.

Since increasing road capacity in the short term was not a possibility; changing driver behavior was a feasible solution to decreasing traffic congestion. By improving the flow of traffic during peak drive times, commute times should decrease. Data was obtained from the WSDOT to determine current average commute times during the targeted “rush hour” time period.

It was also seen that this would involve not only drivers but also WSDOT and WSP working to keep the roadways clear by rapidly responding to collisions and blocking disabled vehicles.

C. Response

The idea was to use local media outlets and social media to educate the public and consistently remind them of the steps they could take to reduce traffic congestion. The following messages “Steer it, Clear it”, “Know Ways to Go” and Courteous/Safe driving tips were utilized.

These awareness messages combined with WSDOT and WSP working to clear collisions and blocking disabled vehicles in a timely manner would provide for a smoother flow of traffic. If enough people changed their driving habits even a small amount, the results would be improved traffic flow and shorter commute times. Throughout the year, various media outlets were utilized to keep the issue fresh with the motoring public.

D. Assessment

Operation R.O.D.E. began in March of 2015 by obtaining average commute times for the freeways connecting the cities of Everett, Seattle, Tacoma and Bellevue during the peak morning commute rush hour (0730-0830). See chart in appendices for actual times. This information was provided by WSDOT on a quarterly basis to measure and track the effectiveness of the project. The final report was received from WSDOT in February 2016 which showed a reduction in average commute times.

Although there are many factors that influence traffic congestion, the success of this project was shown by identifying the highest impact and most cost-effective efforts to relieve congestion is to continue to get the message out on promoting desirable driving behavior. With roadway capacity being relatively fixed and requiring substantial time and money to expand; the only congestion variable we can impact are the vehicles on the road, specifically, drivers and commuters.

By keeping the motoring public engaged and aware their driving behavior can have a direct effect on traffic congestion, we can improve or stabilize commute times. We will continue to utilize various strategies that reinforce positive driving behaviors to maintain smooth traffic flow and decrease congestion.

Appendices

TRAVEL TIME CALCULATIONS:

1. Spot speeds are measured every 1/2 mile on the freeway system.
2. Those spot speeds are assumed to be the speed for the each 1/2 mile.
3. The measured speed and known distance is then turned into a travel time.
4. After that is calculated there is an adjustment for forecasted traffic.

Commute Routes	Dates of Survey						
	<i>Mar 2013</i>	<i>Mar 2014</i>	<i>Mar 2015</i>	<i>Jun 2015</i>	<i>Sep 2015</i>	<i>Dec 2015</i>	<i>Feb 2016</i>
Everett to Seattle	50	63	69	65	66	74	54
Everett to Bellevue	56	65	68	65	66	66	49
Tacoma to Seattle	59	61	75	75	71	84	66
Tukwila to Bellevue	35	41	49	46	49	51	41

COMMUTE TIME COMPARISON BETWEEN MARCH 2015 AND FEBRUARY 2016:

- Everett - Seattle: 69/54
(-15 min, 22%)
- Everett - Bellevue: 68/50
(-18 min, 27%)
- Tacoma - Seattle: 75/68
(-7 min, 10%)
- Tukwila - Bellevue: 49/41
(-8 min, 17%)

Agency and Officer Information

Key Project Team Members:

Sergeant Mark Francis, Washington State Patrol, Marysville District Office

WSDOT personnel

Various local media

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