New Jersey Department of Transportation
Bureau of Research

Technical Brief

Crash Records Collection Policy Examination and Best Practices Review

The performed research was designed to provide the NJDOT Bureau of Research with a specific set of crash reporting threshold information. This information includes the marginal - average cost of a crash report, the legislative requirements to update the threshold, and the best practices of crash reporting policies and procedures. In addition to this information, the report provides recommendations on what New Jersey should update its threshold to, how to maximize private vendors in the crash reporting process, and the impacts of upgrading from manual to electronic crash reporting.

Background

Vehicle crashes cost States tremendous amounts of resources, both in terms of lost life and property damage, as well as the costs to maintain crash reporting operations. The costs to maintain crash reporting are great and require the involvement of State and local law enforcement agencies, the NJ Motor Vehicle Commission (MVC), NJDOT and private vendors. New Jersey's property damage only (PDO) crash reporting threshold impacts these costs, and raising this threshold may result in cost savings for all, or some of the aforementioned agencies. The purpose of this document is to ascertain the impacts of raising the threshold and whether these impacts would be cost-related, efficiency-related, or both, and what agencies would be affected.

Research Objectives and Approach

The goal of this research was to provide NJDOT with a comprehensive understanding of numerous elements of crash reporting thresholds. The largest objectives were to determine the costs and benefits of collecting crash reports at the current threshold, and based on this, whether or not New Jersey should raise its crash reporting threshold. The research sought to identify the available options to raise it, the positive and negative impacts to raising it, and whether or not raising it requires a legislative process. Finally, assuming legislative action is necessary, the research sought to answer what additional crash reporting elements should be taken into consideration in the legislative process.

The research team accomplished this through:

- A literature and best practices review of academic and governmental studies, reports, and websites that documented setting thresholds, and costs and benefits of crash reporting;

- A scan of property damage thresholds, total licensed drivers, total crashes and total injury crashes of all 50 states;
- A detailed 10 state comparison that included State DOT interviews;
- An in-depth NJDOT crash reporting analysis to assess crash reporting costs;
- A final report detailing the results of the research activities.

Findings

The research team determined that New Jersey's current PDO threshold is low by national standards; particular actions would aid the State towards greater crash reporting efficiencies and data accuracy and has the following findings for NJDOT:

- A relationship between a PDO threshold increase and crash record reduction exists and it is likely that increasing New Jersey's PDO threshold will reduce the number of reported crashes;
- New Jersey should raise its PDO threshold to at least $1000;
- New Jersey should collaboratively develop legislature to improve crash data quality and timely crash submissions;
- Fewer reported crashes may not decrease costs for NJDOT, due to the fact that all overhead costs would remain the same for the Crash Records Unit;
- Fewer reported crashes would yield less crash data for safety purposes; however, this only impacts minor crashes and not injury, fatality and serious crashes;
- Municipalities have limited incentives to submit accurate and punctual crash reports;
- Non-electronic crash reporting is error prone and labor-intensive staff review is needed to compensate for this;
- Electronic crash reporting systems yield increased timeliness and data quality;
- There is little data available on marginal costs of reporting crashes.

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A final report is available online at: http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/refdata/research/. If you would like a copy of the full report, send an e-mail to: Research.Bureau@dot.state.nj.us.

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