

'Stop' signs can cause higher speed — TIA

By Tim Richard
Staff Writer

Neighborhood folk wisdom says that if you put up "stop" signs, you'll slow down traffic.

Not so, says the Traffic Improvement Association (TIA) of Oakland County. It will correct that and other myths about safety in a series of videotapes it is sponsoring. Prime audience: city and village councils which often wrongly yield to pressure from neighborhood groups and install stop signs, traffic lights and unrealistic speed limits.

"The chiefs of police and city managers are ecstatic," said Bruce Madsen, TIA managing director. "They are convinced this will help."

With a \$42,800 grant from the Michigan State Police's Office of Highway Safety Planning, TIA has hired Victor Forbes advertising agency to produce the 35-minute videotapes to educate local decision makers. The tapes also will be available to the public via cable TV.

"STOP SIGNS installed in the wrong places for the wrong purposes usually create more problems than they solve," according to TIA's script.

Where they're used as nuisances or speed breakers, drivers often intentionally run through them, studies in Oakland and elsewhere show. Madsen noted a Troy test showed only 22 percent actually stopped.

And speeds between intersections actually are higher than if the signs hadn't been installed. "They give children a false sense of security," he said.

The first videotape, featuring Troy City Manager Frank Gerstenecker, will be available in a couple of weeks. "We expect to have all eight done by August or September," Madsen said.

Something like 39 communities in Oakland have responsibility for their roads, he said, and reaching them all with seminars is time-consuming and expensive. "Because of attri-

tion," he added, "it could be ongoing." Hence the collection of videotapes.

HERE ARE the other myths and a general outline of traffic engineers' answers to be covered in the other videotapes:

• "What's a 'Children at Play' sign help protect our kids?"

Studies in cities where such signs were widely posted in residential areas show no evidence they reduce pedestrian accidents or speeds. The signs actually do a disservice by causing them to encourage kids to play in the street.

They are justified around schools, playgrounds, parks and recreational places.

• "A signal will cut accidents at our intersection — right?"

Not always. In many cases, accidents increase — especially rear-end collisions. Pedestrians are lulled into a false sense of security. There are nationally accepted standards for installing traffic signals.

• "Why not a lower speed limit to reduce hazards in our area?"

An unrealistically low speed limit actually can lead to more accidents. Driver speed is influenced more by roadway appearances and prevailing traffic than by signs with numbers. Some drivers ignore an unreasonable speed limit, disrupting the uniform traffic flow and reducing the number of "breaks" in traffic. It becomes more difficult for pedestrians to cross.

Speed limits should be based on what's safe and prudent under normal conditions. State law says drivers must be able to "stop within the assured clear distance ahead."

• "Why can't we use 'speed bumps'?"

The speed bump is an increased hazard to the unwary, a challenge to the daredevil, a disruption of the movement of emergency vehicles, the cause of noise and a real problem in snow removal.

Local governments face liability suits for injuries due to speed bumps.

Michigan officially has rejected them as a standard traffic control device on public streets.

NOW 26 YEARS old, TIA is a private, non-profit group supported by auto manufacturers, county government, the Oakland County Road Commission, law enforcement people and universities. It's headquartered in a Michigan National Bank building in Bloomfield Township.

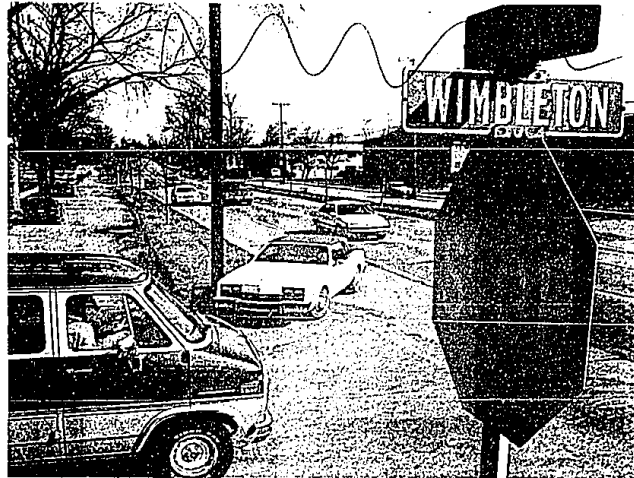
TIA takes a share of credit for reducing traffic fatalities by more than half, based on traffic volumes, in two decades.

"We have, for 15 years now, held 'early bird' sessions in which we bring together 75 to 100 public officials — chiefs of police, traffic managers, city managers," Madsen said.

"The format works well. We have a series of very short presentations on traffic-related activities — what's new out of Washington, new grants, someone from Lansing."

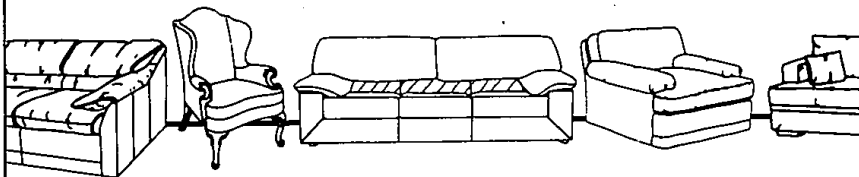
"Then every 1 1/2 to two years, we ask the early birds to give us a list of two or three things they need to improve traffic in their communities. We generated a 75-item wish list, then a master plan of things that need doing. The last time we did this was December of 1986."

One item on the wish list was to reduce the 210-day "turnaround" period from the time traffic statistics are sent to Lansing and they are reported by the state. A second was senior citizen driver retraining, a program currently going on.



"Stop" signs tell drivers who has the right of way at busy intersections like this. As "speed breakers" in the wrong place, they cause more problems than they solve, according to the Traffic Improvement Association of Oakland County.

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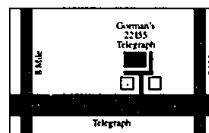
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