

# ALLIANCE IN MOTION NEWSLETTER

## Meet the Winners of the VHSA 2026 Video PSA Contest!

This year's PSA contest winners were recognized at an award ceremony on Wednesday, April 15, 2026, at the Vermont State House. Their creative messages were developed after receiving a lesson on distracted driving developed by UVM Health.

Senator Becca White said, "VHSA's PSA contest offers Vermont's high school students educational opportunities, both to learn our state's laws and the risks of driving distracted. It is evident from viewing the winning videos that these students have acquired professional skills that will benefit them in their futures!"

The PSA contest also highlighted April as National Distracted Driving Awareness Month, helping new drivers and motorists of all ages keep this safety issue top of mind. A new report from the USDOT shows that eighteen people are injured every half hour in distracted driving crashes, and one person is killed about every 2.5 hours. In Vermont, distracted driving-related crashes represent 11.3% of all fatal road fatalities over the past decade.

The 2026 contest winners are:

- 1st Place: Mary Margaret Jones & Liam Taylor, River Valley Tech Center, Springfield
- 2nd Place: Jacob Villeneuve, Center for Technology Essex, Essex Junction
- 3rd Place: Gabriel Pfaff, Mount Mansfield Union High School, Jericho
- Honorable Mention: Chloe Perreault, Center for Technology Essex, Essex Junction

Winning student PSAs were selected by a panel of ten judges. More than \$2,500 in cash prizes were awarded, made possible through the generous support of AAA Northern New England, Co-operative Insurance Companies, the Vermont Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association (VDTSEA), Yankee Driving School, Westside Driving, and the Vermont Construction Association.



*Pictured above L-R: Mary Margaret Jones, Liam Taylor, Jacob Villeneuve, Gabriel Pfaff*



*VHSA members pictured L-R: Jon Marcoux, Suzanne Grace, Diana Gugliotta, Allison Laflamme, and JamieLee Bedard*

**The winning PSA will be shared through social media and featured at Lake Monsters home games this season.**

## Is Social Resistance Slowing the Traffic Safety Innovation Needed to Reach Zero?

Preventable crashes continue to take lives and change families and communities forever. While education and enforcement remain critical, we are at a pivotal moment in traffic safety; one where technology offers powerful tools to prevent crashes before they happen. The question is no longer if technology can save lives, but how quickly and effectively we can deploy the technology. But many states lack the policies, public support, and political will to deploy or utilize available advances. Technology in traffic safety isn't just futuristic automation, it includes everything from seat belts to advanced driver assistance systems. Today we have the ability to use technology not only to protect people during crashes, but to prevent risky behavior in the first place.

The 2026 Lifesavers Conference included a panel of experts including Kit Delgado, M.D. M.S., Associate Professor, Emergency Medicine & Epidemiology, University of PA, Owen McShane, Vice President of Government Relations, FaceTec, Stephanie Manning, Chief Government Affairs Officer, MADD, and Justin Meyers, President/CEO of BusPatrol for a conversation. This conversation provided opportunities to identify programs that revealed critical data, saved lives and changed behavior.

The potential is extraordinary- the problem is that most of this technology is not utilized due to policy restrictions. Public acceptance for technology that gathers vehicle data and identifies individuals is a barrier, even in a society that wants to protect people from traffic injuries and fatalities. How can we ethically leverage this data to improve safety?

One of the most important takeaways from current research lies in the Safe Systems Approach- we must stop designing systems for the ideal driver and start designing for the real driver. Today's drivers are more distracted, more rushed, and more reliant on technology. Stress "takes over" our behavior and as a result, traditional approaches that rely on willpower alone, like "don't text and drive" are not enough.

As a result, we need systems that default to safety through passive safety systems built into vehicles, systems that provide real-time feedback and remove opportunities for dangerous decisions. Perhaps one of the most promising areas of technology is impaired driving prevention. Advances in passive alcohol-detection technologies installed by manufacturers can detect impairment without requiring driver action. Thanks to the [DRIVE to HALT Drunk Driving Act](#), drunk driving could become a thing of the past, and the cost barrier may be smaller than many assume. Some emerging technologies could be implemented through software updates to existing systems—potentially costing as little as \$1 per vehicle. When compared to the enormous societal cost of impaired driving, currently estimated at \$280 billion annually, the investment is clear to some, yet not to others.

The panel's examples of successful outcomes include automated enforcement systems like school bus cameras that have shown the ability to reduce dangerous driving behaviors by 50–90% when deployed consistently and transparently. Telematics and usage-based insurance programs can track behaviors like speeding, hard braking, and phone use—and when paired with feedback and incentives, they can reduce distracted driving by 25–30%.

Another emerging area of innovation focuses on identity verification and fraud prevention within driver licensing systems. Companies like [FaceTec](#) provide biometric facial recognition that helps DMVs and other government agencies detect individuals who attempt to hold multiple identities—often to evade suspensions or impaired driving convictions. In one large-scale analysis by the state of New York, more than half of identified fraud cases involved individuals attempting to bypass penalties related to impaired driving or license revocation.

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By linking a driver securely to a single verified identity, these systems enhance accountability and help ensure that high-risk drivers cannot simply re-enter the system under a different name. This approach not only supports enforcement, but also strengthens the integrity of the entire licensing system—an often overlooked but critical component of roadway safety. Equally important is how we use data to inform and fund these technologies. When licensing and enforcement data are analyzed effectively, they can reveal clear patterns of risk—such as higher rates of crashes, impaired driving, and seat belt violations among individuals attempting to circumvent licensing laws. This type of data has been successfully used to secure federal grant funding, allowing states to deploy advanced safety technologies with minimal direct cost to the state. Technology investments in traffic safety are not just expenses, they are strategic, data-driven solutions that can unlock additional funding while targeting the highest-risk behaviors on our roads.

Technology alone is not the solution. Its success depends on how it is introduced and supported. The greatest impact to leveraging behavior happens when citizens seek solutions to problems that threaten safety in their communities. When technology is paired with clear public education about how systems work, transparent implementation focused on safety—not revenue and consistent enforcement to reinforce accountability.

When people understand why technology is in place and how it protects them, acceptance grows, and behavior follows. Behavior changes when people are aware, accountable, and motivated. For Vermont, this presents the opportunity to expand the use of data-driven tools like telematics and speed feedback systems. As transportation safety professionals we can advocate for smart, equitable deployment of automated enforcement, support policies that accelerate vehicle safety technology adoption and continue building a positive traffic safety culture through initiatives like Drive Well VT. Most importantly, we can work to ensure that technology is used not just to react to crashes, but to prevent them entirely.



Europe and Asia have interconnected every major city on their continents over the last 30 years with high-speed rail.

We haven't built a single lane mile in any type of significant way.

And the problem is that today we've priced ourselves out of that infrastructure. It just cost way too much money to build high speed rail today. At this point it would cost the GDP of a large European country just to connect the thoroughfares on the east and west coast of the United States.

That same thing is going to happen with technology as a whole roadway safety and public safety technology. We're going to price ourselves out. The cost of a RAM chip has gone up about 400x in the last 12 months. And that's going to continue as the rest of the world buys these technologies- buys cameras and deploys (technology). The cost is going to rise and we're going to be sitting here with a lack of social acceptance and a lack of investment into these technologies. We're going to price ourselves out of being a 21st century technological power

that utilizes technology for public safety.



*-Justin Meyers, President & Chief Innovation Officer, Bus Patrol & (Ret.) Chief of Operations at New York City Public Safety*

# Bicycle Safety is in our Reach!

Across the U.S., communities are investing in safer streets but sometimes, the most effective solutions are also the simplest. One such solution is the Dutch Reach, a small behavioral change with a big impact on protecting cyclists and other vulnerable road users.

The Dutch Reach is a method of opening your car door using the hand farthest from the door- your right hand if you're the driver, and your left hand if you're a front-seat passenger. This naturally forces your body to rotate, prompting you to look over your shoulder for approaching cyclists, pedestrians, or scooters before opening the door. The technique originated in the Netherlands, a country known for its world-class cycling infrastructure and safety culture. There, it's not just a recommendation, it's part of driver education and licensing exams.

This simple technique protects cyclists from "dooring" crashes. "Dooring" occurs when a driver or passenger opens a car door into the path of an oncoming cyclist. These crashes can cause serious injuries or fatalities, especially in urban areas with on-street parking and bike lanes. Reports show that dooring crashes are common because cyclists often have little time to react, particularly in narrow lanes or high-traffic corridors. Even at low speeds, dooring incidents can result in severe injuries due to sudden impact or secondary collisions with moving vehicles. By encouraging drivers to use the Dutch Reach, we introduce a built-in pause and visual check, a critical moment that can prevent a crash entirely.

Behavioral studies show that using the far hand increases the likelihood of a shoulder check by over 50%, dramatically improving awareness of approaching cyclists. Cities including Boston, Chicago, and Toronto have incorporated Dutch Reach messaging into driver education campaigns, ride share training, and even vehicle decals.

May is National Bike Safety Awareness Month, so help spread the word about this high-impact intervention in Vermont's driver education curricula, employer fleet safety trainings, ride share and delivery driver training. As we continue working toward safer roads for everyone, let's not overlook the power of simple actions. A single glance over your shoulder, built into how you open your door, can be the difference between a routine trip and a life-altering crash.

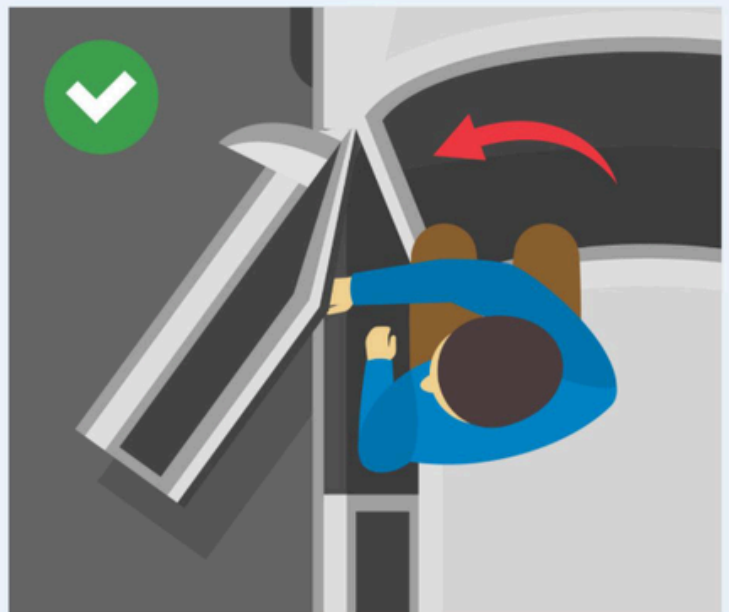
## TYPICAL WAY

USING CLOSEST HAND TO OPEN THE DOOR



## DUTCH REACH

USING FAR HAND TO OPEN THE DOOR





The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) has a new “Seat Belt Law Calculator” tool that helps states better understand how legislative changes to current occupant protection laws could save lives.

If Vermont transitioned from secondary to primary seat belt enforcement, IIHS’s methodology predicts a 10.5% increase in backseat belt use, resulting in a 9% reduction in rear seat deaths and an estimated 4.7% increase in front seat belt use, reducing front seat occupant fatalities by 3.7%. Factoring in frequency of occupant utilization of front and rear seat positions, **the model estimates a 4.2% reduction in Vermont crash fatalities by strengthening the current law to primary enforcement.**

*\*There is no law in Vermont restricting or prohibiting people from riding in the cargo area of a pickup truck.*

## Wrong-Way Driving: A Persistent and Preventable Threat

Wrong-way driving crashes remain one of the most dangerous and preventable threats on our roadways. [A new research brief from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety](#) provides the most up-to-date national analysis of these crashes, and the findings carry important implications for Vermont’s safety strategies. While wrong-way crashes account for a relatively small share of total crashes, their severity is disproportionately high due to the likelihood of high-speed, head-on collisions. The new analysis found:

- 4,164 fatal wrong-way crashes occurred on divided highways between 2014 and 2023.
- These crashes resulted in 5,730 deaths nationwide.
- Annual crashes nearly doubled over the study period (from 278 in 2014 to 520 in 2023).
- Their share of fatal crashes on divided highways increased from 3.4% to 4.6%.

Even as overall traffic fatalities increased, wrong-way crashes grew at a faster rate, highlighting a persistent and worsening safety issue. Consistent with prior research, the AAA study reinforces that wrong-way driving is strongly associated with high-risk driver behaviors and conditions:

- **Alcohol impairment remains the most significant risk factor.**
- **Older drivers are overrepresented.**
- **Drivers without valid licenses are more likely to be involved.**

The research also identified several emerging or previously under-examined risk factors. Wrong-way crashes are more likely to occur in **rural areas** (1.8 times higher odds than in urban areas), during **darkness or dawn/dusk conditions** when visibility is reduced, and among **drivers who are far from home**, suggesting unfamiliarity with the roadway. These crashes also more frequently **involve vehicles not registered to the driver.**

These findings align closely with Vermont’s known crash risk factors. Impaired driving remains a persistent challenge, rural roadway environments dominate much of the state’s network, and nighttime or low-visibility conditions are common risk windows. These factors suggest that Vermont may face elevated vulnerability to wrong-way crashes, even if absolute numbers remain low.

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To reduce the risk of wrong-way crashes, researchers emphasize a combination of infrastructure improvements, technology, and targeted enforcement. Many wrong-way incidents begin with driver confusion at interchange ramps, particularly at night or when impaired. As a result, one of the most effective countermeasures is improving the visibility and clarity of ramp signage and pavement markings. Larger “Do Not Enter” and “Wrong Way” signs, enhanced reflectivity, and red retroreflective markers along off-ramps can provide immediate visual cues to alert drivers before they enter a highway in the wrong direction.

Advanced detection and warning systems are also showing strong promise. These systems use cameras or radar to identify wrong-way vehicles and can trigger flashing warning lights or send real-time alerts to transportation agencies and law enforcement. In some states, these technologies are being integrated with connected vehicle systems, allowing in-vehicle alerts to warn drivers directly. While still emerging, these tools have the potential to reduce both the frequency and severity of wrong-way crashes by enabling faster intervention.

The research also highlights interchange design strategies that naturally discourage wrong-way entry, such as improved ramp alignment, channelization, raised medians, and directional arrows that guide drivers more intuitively. For rural states like Vermont, where lighting may be limited and high-speed roadways are common, these design improvements can be particularly impactful. The report recommends prioritizing high-risk locations, such as interchanges with a history of wrong-way incidents, for these upgrades.

By pairing these behavioral approaches with proven engineering and technology solutions, Vermont can take a proactive, data-driven approach to preventing wrong-way crashes and ultimately save lives.



### **Pediatric vehicular heatstroke**

can happen in any family, in any state. On July 24, 2024, an 18 month-old child in Milton, Vermont, was left in a car on an 83 degree day in the parking lot of a business on Centre Drive.

As temperatures warm up, encourage parents and caregivers to remember to place a purse, phone, or work bag in the back seat. The majority of these tragedies occur when children are forgotten by a caregiver, and there is a change in their daily routine. It's also important to lock vehicles, as some children unknowingly gain access to the vehicle and then cannot get out. Never leave a child unattended in a vehicle to finish a nap, or to run an errand. Look before you lock.



## May is Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month!

According to the latest NHTSA data from 2024, 6,228 motorcyclists were killed in traffic crashes, representing 15% of all the traffic fatalities that year. The fatality rate for motorcyclists was 27 times higher than that of passenger car occupants. Speed and alcohol impairment are the leading contributors in fatalities among motorcycle riders. Thirty-seven percent of motorcycle riders involved in fatal crashes were speeding, compared to 22% of all passenger car drivers. Of the motorcycle riders who died in single-vehicle crashes, 40% were alcohol-impaired.

This spring and summer VHSA will be asking motorcyclists to make pledges to wear protective clothing and DOT-compliant motorcycle helmets, ride sober, avoid distractions, and obey speed limits.

With our partners at DMV, we encourage new and experienced motorcyclists to participate in rider education courses. Please visit [dmv.vermont.gov/driver-education/ridewell#rcp](https://dmv.vermont.gov/driver-education/ridewell#rcp) or contact Frederick Gaudette at 802-828-2068 or [frederick.gaudette@vermont.gov](mailto:frederick.gaudette@vermont.gov) for information.

### Final Notes

#### VHSA welcomes new partners!

The next VHSA Board & Partner meeting will be held virtually on June 9<sup>th</sup> from 10-11am.

An in-person VHSA Board & Partner meeting will be held on August 4<sup>th</sup> from 10-12:00 at the Vermont Fire Academy, 93 Davidson Dr., Pittsford, VT.

We encourage all VHSA partners to share traffic safety messaging! Drive Well VT has seasonal marketing and educational materials available for download at <https://drivewell.vermont.gov/>. This messaging is customized for Vermonters!

NHTSA's Click It or Ticket national high-visibility enforcement campaign will run May 11-31.

These materials are available at [trafficsafetymarketing.gov](https://trafficsafetymarketing.gov)



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