

2019 UDOT RESEARCH PROBLEM STATEMENT

*** Problem statement deadline is Feb. 6, 2019. Submit statements to UTRAC@utah.gov. ***

Title: Travel Behavior and Perceptions Among Young Drivers

No. (Office Use): 19.03.19

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Select ONE Subject Area Materials/Pavements Maintenance Traffic Mgmt/Safety Structures/Geotech
 Planning Perf Mgmt/Data Analytics Public Transportation Other

1. Describe the problem to be addressed:

Utah has long been known for having a very young population. As of Fall 2018, the state had over 130,000 students attending public high-schools (www.schools.utah.gov) comprising nearly 5% of the state's total population. The legal driving age in the state is 16 (with restrictions) and a majority of young adults will begin driving during their high school tenure. As these young drivers take to the roads, they also begin to make their own transportation decisions, independent of their parents, they learn to create a balance between personal preference and utilitarian need. However, half of all teens will be involved in a car crash before graduating from high school. Teens crash most often because they are inexperienced. They struggle judging gaps in traffic, driving the right speed for conditions and turning safely, among other things.

In the Fall of 2018, in an effort to better understand the travel behavior and decision making of young drivers, a survey of 1,223 students at Copper Hills High School was conducted. The survey found that convenience is a major factor in determining student travel behavior, often at the expense of safety. When asked about the potential to change their travel behavior, 8.4% indicated that if it were more convenient they would be willing to bike to school, and 24% indicated they would bike if it were safer (bike lanes, bicycle parking, etc). Over 20% of students stated they would walk more if it were more convenient and 17% would ride the bus. Nearly all (99%) of responding students had a driver's license, and 54% reported having access to a vehicle anytime they need one. Promoting multi-modal travel among young drivers can work to increase their awareness and experience along the roadway environment while limiting their VMT during a critical time, therefore reducing their potential exposure to crash risk.

First, using our existing pilot survey as a guide, the project team will work with Elizabeth Waite and the Travelwise team to coordinate survey efforts with their millennial survey effort and craft a survey tool that is mutually beneficial for multiple divisions within UDOT. Additionally, this project will coordinate with the Utah Highway Safety Office, the Drivers License Division and the Utah State Office of Education to ensure that survey results can be integrated as appropriate to shape future drivers education training and work cooperatively with the goals of the Pedestrian Safety Action Plan. Second, a sample of 15-20 geographically and demographically diverse high schools will be chosen under the direction of the TAC, with a target of 15,000 responses. Third, the survey tool will be screened and approved through each school district's internal review board before being administered to students ages 15-18 currently enrolled in the school. Lastly, survey results will be coded, cleaned and compiled and complete evaluation and analysis will be conducted. The results of this research will allow UDOT to better understand and influence the travel behavior of the next generation of drivers through programs such as Travelwise and the drivers education program.

2. Write the project objective (25 words or less):

Survey Utah high school students regarding their current and potential travel behavior to determine their perceptions and preferences for driving and potential to use other modes.

3. Explain why this research is important:

(In response, consider addressing specific UDOT goals, applicability in Utah or other states, etc.)

Young drivers will shape the future of our state transportation landscape as they join the workforce and become a vital component of our travel community. Understanding their perceptions and preferences will allow UDOT to target this population and encourage smarter travel behavior choices. Additionally, this research will allow UDOT to compare travel behavior of young drivers in various geographic areas and contrast their preconceived perceptions of the transportation system and mode choice options.

