

# Arkansas Uses Public Outreach to *Pave The Way* During Interstate Rehabilitation

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FACT SHEET

The Arkansas State Highway & Transportation Department (AHTD) embarked on one of the largest public works efforts in the state's history in 2000 as it set out to rebuild or resurface over 350 aging Interstate miles in an unprecedented 5-year time frame. Successful communications with the general public, as well as legislators and community leaders, has been a cornerstone of the Interstate Rehabilitation Program's ongoing success. Realizing that potential negativity arising from serious crashes and traffic delays could have an impact on the continuation of the program's accelerated time frame, AHTD implemented a multi-faceted information campaign to reduce congestion and keep road travelers safe, informed, and focused as they navigate work zones.

## Campaign Encourages Motorists to Think Ahead

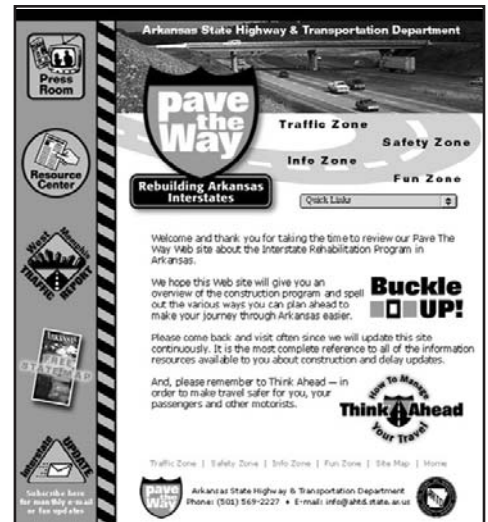
Work began on creating a safety and information campaign entitled *Pave The Way*, along with the sub-theme, Think Ahead. Incorporating clearly identifiable logos and consistent graphics using familiar construction elements and colors, AHTD developed a "brand" that the public could easily associate with the program. Through the campaign, motorists are encouraged to plan for construction while staying focused on the end result.

Resources include an interactive web site at [www.ArkansasInterstates.com](http://www.ArkansasInterstates.com) that has project information, including real-time traffic information for designated projects; brochures and posters; radio public service announcements; standard and variable message roadside signage; highway advisory radio (HAR) broadcasts; a monthly electronic newsletter; a trade show exhibit; pre-written newsletter copy; and materials for community partners to use.

ArkansasInterstates.com has 4 areas: Traffic Zone, for travel details; Info Zone, for program information; Safety Zone, for planning and driving tips; and Fun Zone, for photos, a trivia game, and fun places to visit. Web site visitors have exceeded 800,000 and electronic newsletter subscribers reached 5,000 to date.

## "Tuning In" to Work Zones

After an initial survey discovered that a majority of motorists are already on the road before they begin to think about road construction, AHTD implemented several roadside resources to reach en-route motorists about workzone locations ahead. A network of eight *Pave The Way* HAR broadcast stations on Interstates entering the state and leaving the central Arkansas area were installed. The HAR recordings are designed to be entertaining as well as informative. Two wise-cracking commentators, "Highway Guy" and "Anita Buckle Up", have proven to be successful in relaying construction and safety information. Interspersed within the recordings are field engineer reports forewarning motorists of the number of workzones, potential areas for traffic back ups, estimated travel times, and other HAR locations. Motorists are encouraged via 12' x 24' roadside signs to tune their radios to 1680 AM upon entering each station's broadcast range.



[www.ArkansasInterstates.com](http://www.ArkansasInterstates.com)



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## Partnerships Help Get the Word Out

Before developing the campaign, AHTD established an Interstate Rehabilitation Program Advisory Board of leaders from tourism, hospitality, emergency management, business, and trucking industries, as well as the press and broadcasting associations and public officials. With the help of these opinion leaders, AHTD was able to gather critical input and tailor the campaign's communication style and information dissemination to audiences who have the greatest impact on Interstate travel. AHTD distributed a direct-mail information packet about the Interstate Rehabilitation Program to Advisory Board member industries, public officials, and colleges/universities. A specially designed Resource Guide brochure encourages target audience recipients to inform their customers, associates, and employees. In some specific urban areas, partnerships were formed with local Chambers of Commerce, emergency management, transportation, hospitality and major attractions managers. Customized messages helped these businesses get customers and employees safely through the surrounding construction and to their door.

## Proactive Media Relations Keep Information Flowing

Ongoing media relationships and promotions have been essential in proactively and efficiently disseminating information. A variety of special events have been set to engage the media's and public's interest such as the campaign's launch, groundbreakings, job completions, billboard unveilings, work zone safety demos, and the launch of work zone intelligent transportation systems (ITS). Involving the Governor of Arkansas and other prominent public officials in media events, such as the HAR network's launch and sign unveiling, was also helpful in bringing the media out for statewide coverage. The *Pave The Way* campaign has been well covered by state, regional, and national media, earning a fifth place ranking in Arkansas' top news stories of 2002.

## Innovative Practices Reduce Severity of Backups

Designing consistent work zones and educating the public about it was also an innovative move for Arkansas with nearly every Interstate work zone of the construction program arranged to merge left first. Approaching traffic merges to the left lane, with the right lane closed initially, regardless of which side is being worked. Motorists quickly recognize what to do upon seeing the first signs of approaching work zones and act accordingly to maximize traffic flow. Merge left warning signs are located two miles before the actual work zone, with reminders to "Merge Now" at one mile and again with enforceable "No Passing Zones" at 1,500 feet before the lane closure. Also, in Arkansas' high-traffic urban areas, AHTD's roving Motorist Assistance Patrols perform a frontline public relations function, helping stranded motorists and moving disabled vehicles safely off the roadway. These efforts combine with the *Pave The Way* campaign to help keep traffic flowing during Interstate rehabilitation.



Roadside signs encourage motorists to tune in and get construction details from field engineer reports blended with studio recordings of commentators "Highway Guy" and "Anita Buckle Up."

Some of the awards AHTD received for their efforts on the *Pave The Way* campaign:

- ARTBA Pride in Transportation Construction Award
- AASHTO President's Award for Highway Safety
- ITSA Best of ITS Award

To download a copy of this fact sheet or view other Mobility and Safety fact sheets, visit our Web site at <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/workzones>

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