

Traffic Tuesday: Changing the Climate of Traffic Safety

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Introduction

Traffic safety and safe driving habits are typically not topics of discussion that are exciting or fun to discuss. While they may not be topics that are actively avoided, there is little desire to breach these topics unless an incident occurs that prompts the discussion (i.e. car accidents, tickets, etc.). The result is commonly a negative and even aggressive attitude between fellow road users, and a lack of discussion promoting safe driving practices. In an effort to change the culture to be more positive and collaborative, many jurisdictions have begun adopting programs that present safety messaging with a more lighthearted approach in their delivery. This document outlines the implementation and reception of Traffic Tuesday, a new initiative managed by the City of Calgary’s Traffic department.

Traffic Tuesday was inspired by a similar program started by Iowa’s Department of Transportation (DOT) called Message Monday (ITS Canada, 2020). The idea is to increase safety awareness and improve safe driving practices. Awareness is brought through the use of unconventional messages that are posted weekly on Dynamic Message Signs (DMS). The style of the messages incorporates a variety of themes, ranging from upcoming holidays to pop culture references to rhyming schemes and more. The conversation prompted through these atypical messages attempts to shine a light on the current state of safety while increasing the road education and driving moral of the average driver and citizen.

Message Creation and Approval

Messages created for Traffic Tuesday are drawn from a variety of sources with the main goal of focusing on safety and creativity. Whenever possible, messages will try and match the monthly safety themes put forth by Alberta Transportation’s Safety Calendar, shown in Figure 1. Incorporating these themes will not only also act as a good starting point for brainstorming new messages, but will also provide citizens with a place to investigate traffic safety further if they so desire. Several other sources of inspiration include seasonal holidays (i.e. New Year’s), current events (i.e. back to school, Calgary Stampede), pop culture references (i.e. Star Wars), rhyme schemes, or any other sources appear relevant and creative. Ultimately, wherever the source of inspiration came from, the main objective of the message shall always be focused on promoting safety of the many modes of transportation that Calgary accommodates.

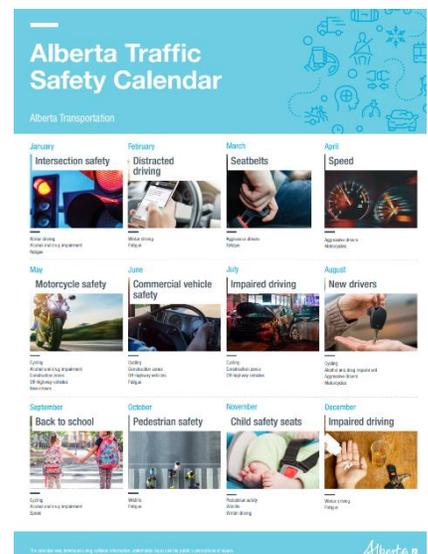


Figure 1: Alberta Traffic Safety

The City of Calgary has developed a multi-tier approval process that must be met prior to messages being displayed. In presenting unconventional messages to the public there is a risk to upset people with subject matter that may be sensitive. To mitigate this, the City of Calgary’s communication team is involved in the approval process to ensure messages are consistent with external communications protocols. Messages are also reviewed to verify there is no advertising of a product or company, as Calgary DMS are not to be used for commercial purposes. The authenticity of Traffic Tuesday is lost if there is an advertising nature to its delivery. Another consideration is message length. The goal is to have commuters glance at messages without distraction from the road for extended periods of time. Members of the City of Calgary’s traffic safety team screen out messages that are deemed too lengthy, taking into consideration factors such as speed limits, typical volume, and DMS board size. Preparing the message schedule is done in six month intervals to ensure there is ample time for approval and scheduling. The schedule



contains the messages, their corresponding signs, and the length of time to be displayed. Calgary’s Traffic Management Centre (TMC) is responsible for uploading the messages to their corresponding signs as per the approved schedule.

Figure 2: Message Timeline

Dynamic Message Sign Selection & Priority

DMS use follows a priority basis, and Traffic Tuesday messages adhere to similar rules as other informative messages. The prioritization of messages requires balancing the severity of its purpose with the duration of its uptime. For example, traffic incidents are immediately impactful to commuters and pose a potential safety concern, but remain relevant for only as long as the incident occupies the road. This combination of high importance with short uptime is why incident information is the highest priority of message. Conversely, travel time information is valuable information for commuters, but poses a minimal safety concern and can remain up for extended periods of time. The low importance coupled with lengthy uptimes allows for these messages to be overwritten when higher priority messages arise. Traffic Tuesday messages are considered informational and not of immediate importance to commuters. However, these messages are only displayed one day per week, and with the reduced weekly uptime Traffic

Tuesday can reasonably be allowed higher priority than all messages except for incident messages.

DMS allocated to Traffic Tuesday have been selected in locations with minimal traffic maneuvers and easy readability to ensure driver safety. The messages are placed strategically such that a message is never displayed on multiple DMS boards in a row on a single corridor. This is to ensure other informative messages (i.e. travel times) are also accessible to commuters. Figure 3 outlines the DMS selected for Traffic Tuesday, including the direction of travel. To minimize financial and environmental impact, only existing message boards were considered, and there are no plans to propose new sign construction for the program.



Figure 3: Traffic Tuesday DMS locations

Communication Plan

A key component to Traffic Tuesday is public involvement and promoting safety discussion. There must be open lines of communication between the City of Calgary and Calgary citizens in order to achieve this. The main lines of communication that are open for Traffic Tuesday will be further discussed below.

Service Requests

Service Requests (SR) are a method of communication available to the public when raising various concerns. These concerns can range from signal timings to road conditions to wildlife management and many more. SR's are designed to try and allow citizens a form of communication regardless of technological ability and can be submitted in a variety of ways (i.e. telephone, cellphone app, internet) to encompass as many demographics as possible.

A potential concern anticipated from Traffic Tuesday is that messages may unintentionally upset citizens. To ensure these citizens are heard, a new SR category has been created that is specific to Traffic Tuesday. This provides an easy avenue of communication directly linked to the message and allows the City of Calgary to track messages that are poorly received, thereby ensuring greater care when revisiting these safety topics. SR's that are created in response to Traffic Tuesday are forwarded directly to Calgary's Traffic Tuesday email distribution list. The team assesses public concerns and flags messages that are poorly received to ensure a more gentle approach is used for the next message pertaining to that safety topic.

Web Page

To help facilitate public discourse there is a new addition to the City of Calgary's web page. This page will act as a central hub for citizens who are looking for more information regarding Traffic Tuesday. Features of this web page currently include a message archive and an invitation to contribute fresh ideas and messages to the program via a message submission portal. The portal is limited to 28 characters per message line to ensure messages fit within the sign constraints. Submissions through the portal are sent to the Traffic Tuesday distribution list for review and potential addition to upcoming schedules.

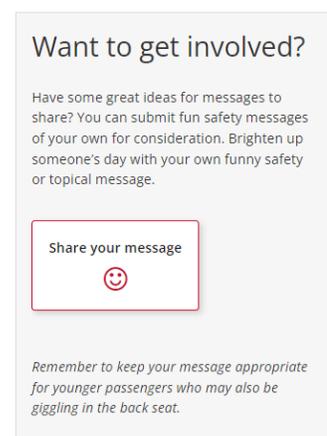


Figure 4: Public Submission Portal (Calgary, 2021)

Direct Feedback

Another feature of the web page is an invitation to email any comments or concerns that citizens may have about the program. This email link sends feedback directly to the Traffic Tuesday email distribution list where the feedback is reviewed and recorded. If necessary, the team will respond to ensure the citizen knows their concerns have been received and taken into consideration.

Public Response

Social Media

The rollout plan for Traffic Tuesday was decided to occur organically, meaning there would be no publicity prior to the first message. This was to ensure an authentic response from the public. The first message (Baby Yoda uses the force / But still needs a car seat!) was displayed on May 4th, 2021 in alignment with National Star Wars Day and received massively positive feedback. Over hundreds of people took to social media to express their delight in the new, lighthearted



Figure 5: Opening May 4th message

tone of DMS messaging and several local radio stations could be heard discussing it throughout the day. The widespread discussion led to more commentary about the appropriate use of car seats while also improving the mood of Calgary drivers, as noted by the hundreds of social media posts expressing as much.

Since its widely popular May 4 message, the program has maintained a steady pace of passive success with over 550 messages submitted through the web portal. A few particular messages have seen tremendous success with thousands of responses witnessed throughout popular social media platforms, and potentially many more that were not captured but discussed nonetheless. Figure 6 shows the estimated weekly social media response (posts, likes, comments, shares, etc.) and illustrates the overwhelmingly positive reception the program has seen. Most notably, TSN posted a hockey themed message during the 2022 playoffs which saw nearly 50,000 responses throughout many forms of social media. The message? If you shoulder check / So will Lucic. Go Flames!

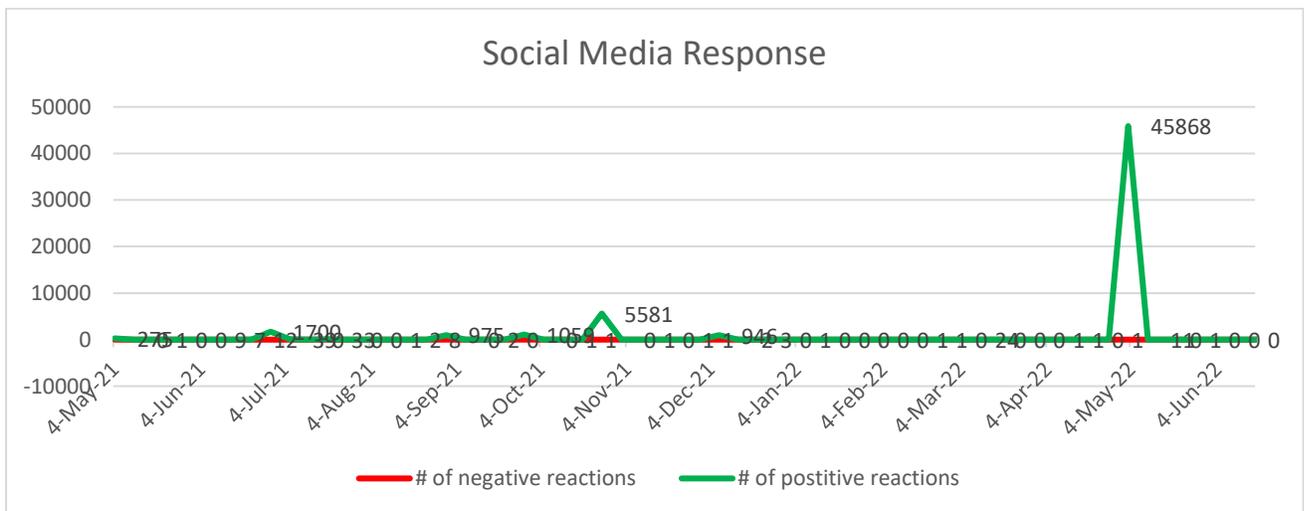


Figure 6: Estimated social media presence

News Outlets

In addition to the social media success that Traffic Tuesday has seen, there have been several noteworthy moments that have transcended general commentary. In the early months of the program there were several features in notable news organizations such as CTV and CBC, as well as several articles from more local magazines. Approximately six months after its inception, the program was picked up by Maclean's magazine and captured attention nationwide. In the weeks that followed, several news outlets featured the story in more prominent roles, including multiple interviews with City of Calgary representatives and even a featured story on the evening edition of CBC News: The National.



Figure 7: Traffic Tuesday on CBC News (The National, 2021)



Maclean's

October 25, 2021 · 🌐

The drive into Calgary is worth a chuckle, thanks to Joseph Kruis, an intern in the city of Calgary's transportation department



MACLEANS.CA

One intern's idea to curb road rage in Calgary—with humour

The drive into Calgary is worth a chuckle, thanks to Joseph Kruis, an intern in the city of Calgary's...

👍🤔❤️ 4.6K

221 Comments 551 Shares

Figure 8: Maclean's magazine Traffic Tuesday feature (Macleans, 2021)

Conclusion

The Traffic Tuesday initiative has seen undeniable successes in terms of achieving public discourse about safe driving practices. There have been over 50,000 measured responses throughout social media that can be directly linked to Traffic Tuesday safety messages and over 99% of commentary has been positive. There have also been many articles and stories featuring the program which have all spread the road safety theme to an untold number of viewers. Public involvement continues to grow with well over 550 suggested messages contributed to the message portal.

But has this program improved safety on our roads? It is difficult to tangibly measure the effectiveness of a safety promoting program due to the multifactorial nature of road incidents, especially when implementation occurred during a time of unprecedented low traffic volumes during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Traffic Tuesday has been running for approximately two years and due to the continued positive feedback there is no plan to stop the program anytime soon.

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