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Use your head - and your brakes - in work zones

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One particularly heart-tugging image seen in some highway work zones is an orange sign bearing the message: "Please slow down. My dad works here."

While that sign appeals for the safety of highway workers, in reality 4 in 5 people killed in work zones are motorists.

"We want the public to crank up their awareness," said Trooper Lonny Haschel, spokesman for the Texas Department of Public Safety.

Haschel joined officials from the North Texas Tollway Authority and the Texas Department of Transportation on Tuesday at a work zone along Interstate 20. Speaking on a newly built bridge over the interstate, the group called for motorists to bear greater responsibility for their actions.

"There is over \$11 billion in construction in the North Texas area, with more on the way," said Brian Barth, Fort Worth deputy district engineer for the state Transportation Department. "Your daily commute to work and school is changing on a daily basis, and we need every driver to stay alert."

Work zone fatalities have fallen 39 percent during the past decade, said Elizabeth Mow, the tollway authority's assistant executive director of infrastructure.

Still, 134 people statewide were killed in work zone crashes last year.

"We need the public's help to complete the picture," Mow said.

Speeding and driver inattention are the leading causes of work zone fatalities, Haschel said.

Distractions such as talking or texting on a mobile device are also a major problem, Barth said. This week is National Work Zone Awareness Week. The group chose Tuesday's site for the news conference because it is part of the Chisholm Trail Parkway project, a 28-mile toll road from downtown Fort Worth to Cleburne that is scheduled to open next year.

The project has created work zones across a swath of southwest Tarrant County, crossing I-30, I-20, Hulen Street and Texas 183 (Southwest Boulevard).

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