



Director's Message

Every day in the lobby of Caltrans headquarters, hundreds of my colleagues and I walk past the Fallen Workers Memorial Plaque. Filled with eight columns of gold nameplates 24 rows deep, this black plaque hangs in stark, somber tribute to the 189 Caltrans professionals who have died in the line of duty since 1921.

The most recent was Maintenance Leadworker William D. Casdorff. He died last September while working along State Route 163 in San Diego and was among those we remembered last April at our annual Caltrans Workers Memorial at the State Capitol.

But the lobby memorial doesn't tell the whole story. Behind each nameplate are countless friends and family members who lost someone achingly precious to them. Also not included on the Caltrans plaque are the hundreds of contractors and local and regional road workers who made the same ultimate sacrifice on California road projects.

The truth is errant drivers cause the vast majority of these deaths. Distracted drivers, intoxicated drivers, speeding drivers. Just think of all the dedicated workers killed and injured while improving the State highway network for all of our benefit.

This is why last year, not long after I started as Caltrans director, I felt the Department must do more. Yes, highway work is inherently dangerous, but that's no reason to accept so many children of transportation workers heading to school one morning who return home to tragic, life-altering news.

After the first contractor deaths last year, Caltrans immediately conducted a statewide safety stand-down. We also organized a Safety Summit among about 20 industry groups. This produced three recommended work-zone safety changes that will improve safety in road work zones.

We have been rolling them out, starting in spring. Where possible to implement, these improvements are:


1. A 10-mile-per-hour speed-limit reduction in work zones when the normal posted speed limit is 35 mph or higher. The reduced limits will be clearly posted, and radar speed feedback signs will communicate to drivers their speeds.

2. Closure of an additional lane to provide an extra buffer between work crews and the speeding traffic. This will not be possible on roads with only one or two lanes in each direction, but will provide a big safety benefit on wider highways.
3. Greater scheduling flexibility to help crews get jobs done faster and more safely.

In addition, I have created a Chief Safety Officer position. This role will lead and deepen Caltrans' culture of safety and oversee training, instill best practices, listen to employees, and partner with our unions and contractors to achieve our shared goal of zero traffic-related deaths on California roads.

At the same time, we understand the public's important role in road safety. We have just launched our new "Be Work Zone Alert" public safety campaign. Its theme features compelling messages from the children of actual Caltrans workers, who know the dangers their parents face better than anyone.

As an engineer, I passionately believe that improving transportation improves the lives of all Californians. But I am equally insistent no highway workers should lose their lives in pursuit of a better transportation system. That is why Caltrans has undertaken such a comprehensive approach for improving road-work safety.

Even more than the Workers Memorial Plaque in our headquarters lobby, I think improving work-zone safety is the best way for us to remember all of our fallen. 

Laurie Berman
Director of Caltrans

Caltrans Director Laurie Berman retired at the end of June after a 36-year career at the Department.

Cover: The Tower Bridge has been a Sacramento landmark almost since its dedication in 1935, and is perhaps the best known of Caltrans' inventory of drawbridges, or movable bridges. Caltrans is spending millions to upgrade these spans that are literally moving pieces of history. The I Street Bridge, not owned by Caltrans, can be seen in the background. *Photo by Scott Lorenzo, Caltrans senior photographer*