

January 2018 Director's Report

Hi, everyone! Welcome to 2018! I hope you had a fun and happy holiday season – with the snow and cold I know many of us were out working to keep everyone safe, and I'm very appreciative of that. You can't believe the number of compliments I receive about the winter maintenance work we do – people really recognize and appreciate the excellent work we do, and you should all be proud of that.

My college kids have all come and gone and now the house is too quiet again, although Erin keeps it lively and we have a mutual hot chocolate appreciation club going. We had a great time having everyone home, and the house was full of lots of kids, laughter, good food, half-empty cans of strawberry pop (finish the first one before you start another one, Matt!), the Star Wars movie, a Star Wars Lego set, a Star Wars puzzle, and nonstop games of "Settlers of Catan," which I thought was something they made up on "Big Bang Theory" until Matt got it for Christmas. (Linda also got me a Death Star ornament that lights up and changes colors and plays audio from the first Star Wars, which, in a way that only makes sense in Star Wars, is the fourth episode. Nothing says "peace on earth" like a planet-killing ornament.)

We usually have a tradition of the kids putting on a musical show Christmas Eve, replete with a program, assigned seating, and tickets that have bar codes on the front and coupons on the back, but for some reason (visiting boyfriends and girlfriends?) no one seemed up to it this year. To keep up the tradition, I surprised everyone by sneaking out after dinner, putting on a penguin costume in the garage, and then sneaking around to the front porch to bang on the window. When they let me in I re-enacted Wheezy the penguin from "Toy Story" singing "You've Got a Friend in Me." (This was mostly my Christmas gift for Mary, who loves that part of "Toy Story.") I'd share the video but some of what Linda and her friend Jo said during my re-enactment is not Toy-Story rated. But Mary loved it, and now I know what it's like to wear yellow tights.

Leaving my home Christmas inanity behind and turning back to work, we (Mitch Dillavou, John Selmer, Charlie Purcell, and I) had the chance to visit the District 5 offices in Fairfield just before Christmas. They put on a great overview of their district

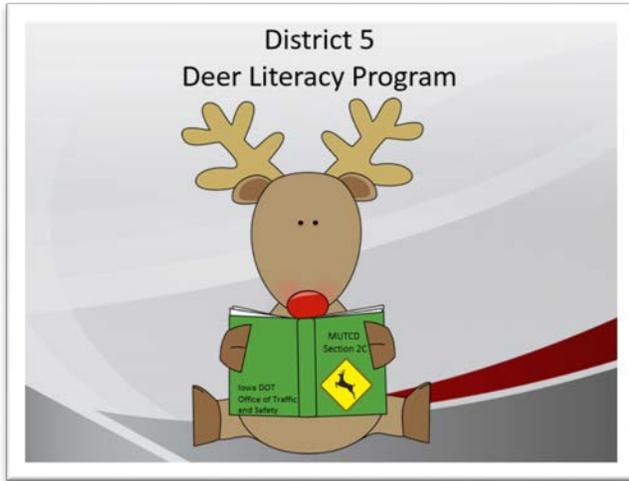


The "real" Wheezy from Toy Story singing "You've Got a Friend in Me." (Voiced by the inimitable Robert Goulet.)



My version of Wheezy. Check out that flipper action!

and key projects they are working on, and we had a really open and wide-ranging conversation about our work and work challenges (including the challenges of getting deer to read deer crossing signs). We were also lucky enough to be there for their Christmas potluck, and it was fantastic – I felt like I was having a second



Hector Torres-Cacho, Transportation Planner in District 5, initiated this deer literacy program.

Thanksgiving or a first Christmas dinner. Thank you to District 5 Engineer Jim Armstrong and everyone at District 5 for the great visit (and great food)!

I also owe District 1 an apology. We visited District 1 in November, and in the rush of putting together my last report I forgot to mention that. That was also a great visit and very active – we traveled all over the district and looked at a number of projects and potential project areas, including the fly-over ramp from I-35 to US 30 (did you know the pattern on the piers is intended to represent computer code?), got a close up look at a 93-foot long tow plow, and even got into some back yards by exploring noise levels along I-35 in West Des Moines. A big thank you (and sorry!) to District 1 engineer Scott Dockstader and his staff!

The party of the third part . . .

This part won't be too long, but I thought I would take a moment to point out something I'm deliberate about. If you notice, I rarely call us "the department," "the agency" or "the Iowa DOT" when I talk about us or our work, whether I'm writing internally like this, or whether I'm talking or writing to outside folks. (For instance, "it is the decision of the department that . . ." or "the agency's rules require . . .") My reason for doing so is simple – words like that are what I call "separator" words – they tend to make us seem distant, officious, bureaucratic, and even a little imposing or uncaring at times, and they end up separating us from the people we're trying to reach. (And besides – have you ever been around someone that refers to themselves in the third-person? They always come off as self-important and self-absorbed. Check out the "Jimmy" episode of Seinfeld as proof: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xoskJPDbXR0>.) Outside of legal documents like contracts, rules, and legislative drafts that demand it, I try to avoid talking about us in the third person, and use terms like "our," "we" and "us." They're friendlier, they're more accessible, they make it easier to write and say things directly, and they humanize us – an organization is just a group of people on a common mission, so we have to be human in everything we do, and people will be more responsive to us when they can see and hear that. Give it a try the next time you're talking or writing about us. "The department" will never do anything, but there's no end to what we can do together!

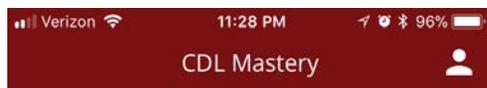
Systems Operations Bureau now the Operations Bureau

I reported last month that Scott Marler was appointed as the director of our Systems Operations Bureau in the Highway Division, and that we added Construction & Material and Motor Vehicle Enforcement to join Traffic Operations, Traffic & Safety, and Maintenance there.

The Bureau's new leadership team recently had their first meeting together, and one of the first things they discussed was its name. As we continue to focus on the importance of operations as a function and discipline of the transportation system, they wanted to ensure its name reflected that focus, as well as the offices that now compose the Bureau.

As I've said before, names will never matter as much as the actual work we do, but names do convey important information. The Bureau's leadership team reflected on the words "Systems Operations". For many of us, when we hear the term "Systems", different images come to mind such as operating systems, mechanical systems, perhaps flooring systems (for anyone who's ever installed laminate flooring). They recognized that "operations" was the common thread among all five offices, ranging widely from winter operations to enforcement and inspection, from traffic engineering operations to work zone management, from real time traffic management to construction administration, from commercial motor vehicle enforcement to materials inspection, and many others. They wanted a name that was simple and straightforward, that could be easily explained, and that reflected our collective purpose of keeping people safe and keeping traffic moving.

After some discussion, they settled on the name "Operations Bureau" for the reorganized bureau. The name conveys the binding theme of the five offices while remaining straightforward and simple to understand. Like the members of our new Operations Bureau, I think it helps bring focus to our on-going operation and



management of the transportation system, and aligns well with our mission of getting you there safely, efficiently, and conveniently. Great teamwork and vision!



Iowa CDL test app home screen.

Governor Reynolds announces the release of our CDL test prep app

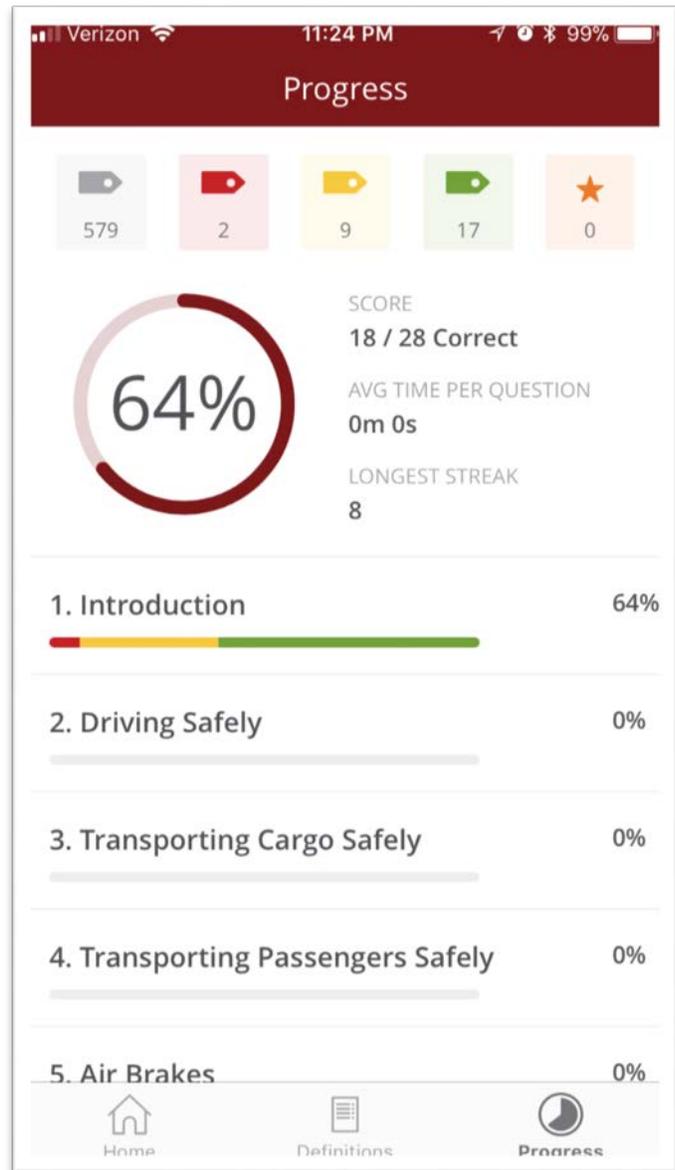
In my October report, I talked about the development of our commercial driver's license (CDL) test prep app. I'm happy to report that the app is now fully deployed and in production and circulation, and was the focus of a press conference with Governor Reynolds and Lt. Governor Gregg on Monday, January 8. The Governor really appreciated our innovation and continued efforts to be customer driven, and held us out as an example for all Iowa agencies.

As a reminder, the app effectively takes the content of the current CDL manual, breaks it down into smaller digestible sections, gives micro-quizzes to test your understanding and competency, and points out areas of strengths and weaknesses to help you focus your study – all to help you really learn the information rather than just memorize it to pass a test. I downloaded it and tried it this weekend, and thought it was really easy to use and very effective – it gives you immediate feedback after each question to let you know whether you got it right and to explain the correct answer, and lets you flag answers as you go into categories of know it (green), somewhat know it (yellow), or don't know it (red). Based on that it gives you a color-coded dashboard that shows you how well you're progressing, lets you assess where you need work, and targets quizzes to areas you need to focus on.

The full content of the app is free for anyone that has an Iowa driver's license or ID. To get the full content at no cost, just go to our website, click on the link to activate your account, and create an account. (It will ask you to enter your date of birth and the last four digits of your driver's license or ID number so we can verify your eligibility for the free version.) Once you have an account created you can either launch the desktop version or download the app from Apple's App Store or Google Play. Logging in with the account you created will unlock all the app features. (Note that people that are not from Iowa can get the app, but they have to pay for the premium testing and progress-tracking features.) Check it all out here:

<https://iowadot.gov/mvd/cdl/iowa-cdl-test-app>.

I'm very proud of our work on this and again congratulate our Motor Vehicle Division team for their creative and innovative work. As I said at the press conference, a vision of being customer driven and a mission of getting



Progress dashboard in our CDL test app.

you there demands new approaches that don't hold people out of the transportation system, but safely draw them in. This new app helps draw people in and creates accessibility and mobility – customers that are prepared to be successful the first time won't get stuck trying to pass the test and will more quickly enter the job market and the transportation industry. Good for us, good for them, good for the economy. Well done!

Spicing up winter maintenance

Our winter maintenance professionals have to deal with all manner of temperatures and weather conditions, and one thing that affects their strategy is the severe cold we've had recently. Craig Bargfrede, Winter Operations Administrator, explained this to us recently and I thought it was worth sharing. Craig explained that the effectiveness of rock salt really diminishes when we start seeing temperatures of five to ten degrees and lower, so when the temps are in the range we have had in the last couple weeks, we adjust our treatment practices to other products like calcium chloride or our "50/50" product, which is a mix of salt and sand.

Calcium chloride is an option because it lowers the freeze point of moisture to around -15 degrees. Our field staff sometimes refers to "spicy blend" which is either a 90/10 or 80/20 mixture of salt brine (salt and water) and calcium chloride. Calcium chloride is exothermic, which means it has a chemical reaction that makes it heat up. This heating reaction can break built-up ice and snow and help keep snow and ice from sticking to the roadway. This blend will burn off ice and snow in colder temps when brine or rock salt alone will not work. The downside to using this product is that it's harder on our roads, so we're doing testing this winter in several locations (SC Leeds, Hanlontown and Decorah) with a couple different deicing products that promise to lower the freeze point but are more natural products that are not as tough on our road surfaces. Craig also explained that some of our garages will shift to more of the 50/50 mix to increase friction in colder temps. They primarily use this as a spot treatment on bridges, intersections and known trouble spots.

Hardly a day goes by that I don't learn something new and interesting about what we do. Thanks, Craig!

Song of the month

This month's song is dedicated to those creative people that plan our Message Monday messages. I'm typing this on Monday, January 8th, which is Elvis's birthday (he would be 83 today), and our Message Monday team recognized that and came up with a safety message Elvis could croon about. So, like our



Our message Monday on Elvis's birthday – January 8th.

Message Monday team, I'm going with "All Shook Up," the Elvis classic that topped the charts for eight weeks in 1957. My mom had the original 45 of this and I listened to it over and over when I was a kid, along with "Hound Dog," "Teddy Bear," "I Got Stung," and her original Bill Haley and the Comets and Buddy Holly and the Crickets 45s. The day the music died is coming next month, so maybe we'll go with Buddy Holly next!

Wellness tip

Eight words: It's not too late, get a flu shot!

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Alright, my friends, I better bring this report to a close. I apologize for this one being a bit shorter than normal – I usually do these over a weekend but my weekend got taken up with other work obligations and sending kids back to school, so it was a Monday night project. We're entering the legislative session and I know there will be lots more to report in the months to come. Stay warm, stay safe, stay well!

Mark