

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Each motor vehicle jurisdiction in the United States has an established process by which it assesses the required knowledge of driver license applicants to determine whether they are able to operate their vehicles safely and thus qualify for a driver's license. Corollary to that assessment process is the jurisdiction's responsibility to provide drivers with the information for which they are to be held responsible during the licensing exam and subsequently while operating their vehicle on our nation's roadways.

The primary means of providing this information to drivers is the jurisdiction's basic driver license manual. Some jurisdictions also produce supplementary materials directed at specific segments of the driving population, such as teenage or elderly drivers, or at specific driving and traffic safety issues, such as red light running or sharing the road with bicyclists.

The nation's motor vehicle jurisdictions also provide information on obtaining specialized licenses such as those required for operating commercial vehicles or motorcycles. While a few jurisdictions include such information within their basic driver license manual, most – including Arizona – produce separate publications for these purposes.

This study was directed at identifying best practices with regard to the basic driver license manual produced by motor vehicle jurisdictions and did not encompass manuals or other information produced by jurisdictions with regard to obtaining specialized operator licenses. To identify best practices, three types of information sources were consulted: (1) driver license manuals produced by motor vehicle jurisdictions throughout the country; (2) driver safety information produced by relevant government agencies and private organizations; and (3) research, news, education, and popular literature.

### KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ The American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA) *Guidelines for Knowledge and Skill Testing* recommend that 212 individual knowledge requirements be addressed in all driver license manuals. Of these 212 items, a total of 119 were addressed by a majority (51% or more) of the manuals reviewed and are considered best practices in subject matter content. That total comprises 43 requirements addressed by 51 to 74 percent of the manuals and another 76 addressed by 75 to 100 percent of the manuals reviewed.
- ▶ Most of the topics identified as best practices in subject matter content are already included and well addressed in the current Arizona driver license manual.

- ▶ Two categories of AAMVA knowledge requirements stand out from the rest in that they are only lightly addressed or omitted altogether by nearly all the manuals reviewed in the study. The two categories are Vehicle Control, which includes such topics as starting, accelerating, and upshifting, and Vehicle Readiness, which includes such topics as vehicle characteristics, drive train configuration, and safety equipment. It is presumed that for reasons of cost, jurisdictions must identify topics that are less critical for inclusion than others, and that these topics were so identified by most of the jurisdictions.
- ▶ The review of the driver manuals and the literature search identified additional topics that should be considered best practices in subject matter content: intersection safety, particularly with regard to red light running; sharing the road with trucks, particularly emphasis on their “No-Zones”; road rage and aggressive driving; driver distraction; seatbelt usage, particularly with regard to the jurisdiction’s primary or secondary seatbelt laws; and following distance, with emphasis on the need for a three- or four-second gap.
- ▶ The questionnaire completed by motor vehicle jurisdictions revealed that:
  - More than half the jurisdictions provide a Spanish version of the manual.
  - More than half the jurisdictions review and update their manual annually or more frequently, while another fourth of the jurisdictions update it as needed.
  - The most common distribution methods are motor vehicle test locations, online, schools and driver training organizations, and via mail at the user’s request. Approximately two-fifths of the jurisdictions also make their manuals available through local law enforcement offices.
  - More than a third of the jurisdictions produce a specialty manual directed at teens and their parents.
- ▶ With regard to format, less than one-fourth (23%) of the jurisdictional manuals reviewed are 8 ½ x 11" in size, which is the size of the Arizona manual. The vast majority (77%) are smaller, with 48% produced in the 5 ½ x 8 ½" size.

## **KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- ▶ Because most of the topics identified as best practices in subject matter content are already included and well addressed in the current Arizona driver license manual, only 18 topics are recommended for addition.
- ▶ While best practice topics are generally well covered in the current Arizona manual, organization and coverage can be improved. It is recommended that an overall graphic redesign of the manual be undertaken, encompassing both reorganization of text and better use of graphic elements to facilitate reader comprehension. The reorganization of text should be directed at placing greater emphasis on high-priority topics – by covering them earlier in the material as well as giving them more

attention – and achieving a more reader-friendly flow of information. Several topics would benefit from expanded discussion, while others can be relocated for improved clarity and/or consolidated to eliminate repetition.

Additionally, the redesign should include increased use of graphic representations to clarify and illustrate complex concepts as well as the use of other graphic elements to improve communication and comprehension of the material.

It is also recommended that the two components of the publication, the driver manual and the customer guide, be transposed so that the driver manual is first, and that a new cover design be created for the combined publication. The design should clearly communicate the publication's function as an information guide for Arizona drivers. Suggestions to accomplish this include using photographs of drivers and passengers who represent various segments of Arizona's demographics as well as incorporating the state's name in the publication title.

- ▶ Because there is a clear preference among jurisdictions for a smaller manual than Arizona's, it is suggested that ADOT consider whether economic benefits would be derived from producing a smaller manual, such as 5 ½" x 8 ½".
- ▶ Additional recommendations include updating ADOT's Spanish translation of the manual to correspond with this update of the English-language version, adding the Spanish-language version to the ADOT website for online access, and undertaking additional research to examine the benefits of producing a specialized manual directed at teenage drivers and their parents – possibly as a co-sponsored project with an appropriate organization or agency.

