

Remarks prepared for
David Strickland
Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

American Transportation and Infrastructure
Summit
Irving, Texas
August 10, 2011
“Shaping a Safer America”

Good morning. It is my pleasure to be here with so many distinguished guests. In particular, I'd like to acknowledge Chairman John Mica of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and Congressman Ralph Hall.

Transportation and Infrastructure are the pillars of our nation. Our transportation system is the economic and personal mobility backbone of this country, and everyone in this room plays a role in keeping it the best in the world.

Under the leadership of Secretary Ray LaHood, the Department of Transportation is focused on making our transportation systems the safest in the world. At the core of our mission is the safety of the American public. And at the National

Highway Traffic Safety Administration, that mission rules our daily lives.

One of the major concerns we have is the burden that traffic crashes impose on the American people in terms of human and economic losses. In 2009, 33,808 people died on our roads and more than 2.2 million were injured. For 2010 we are estimating that the number killed will drop to 32,788, the smallest number of fatalities since 1949. The fatality rate, too, will achieve the lowest level ever recorded.

And this progress comes even as Americans drove a greater number of miles than ever before. The projected decrease in fatalities for 2010 occurred despite an estimated increase of nearly 21 billion miles in national Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT).

All told, deaths on U.S. highways declined approximately 25 percent over the six year period from 2005 to 2010.

Despite these significant gains, Secretary LaHood and the Department believe that this number of fatalities is still unacceptable.

Motor vehicle crashes exact a tremendous economic drain on our society. In 2000, the estimated annual cost of traffic crashes was \$230 billion, more than \$820 per person then in the United States. We're updating this cost analysis, but even with the significant improvements in safety realized since 2000, we expect the updated estimates to still be significant.

We are not alone. On a global scale, the statistics on traffic fatalities are just as serious. The World

Health Organization (WHO) estimates that more than one million people die and millions more are injured in traffic crashes worldwide and the global annual economic cost of road crashes is nearly \$600 billion.

For our part, I believe we are putting the right framework in place to strengthen our Nation and our industry. NHTSA's work is part of an overall framework to improve quality of life in America. The President set the national framework with a transformative transportation policy. The Nation's Livable Communities Initiative will measurably enhance the quality of life for families, workers, and communities across America.

This initiative has many components supported by many agencies, but for Transportation this means

Federal support for more transportation choices, including public transportation, and more commercial and residential development around transportation hubs, using roads, rail, transit and more choices to walk or bike to your destination.

With this national framework in place, efforts made at the vehicle level will be that much more effective. That framework extends to how we power our fleet.

There is no silver bullet to address rising gas prices in the short term, but there are steps we can take to ensure the American people don't fall victim to skyrocketing gas prices over the long term. These steps will also contribute to a cleaner, healthier America for our children.

This includes continuing to increase safe and responsible domestic oil and gas production, investing in home grown alternative fuels and increasing fuel efficiency in the cars we drive.

Just two weeks ago, President Obama announced a historic agreement with 13 major automakers for the next phase in the Administration's national vehicle program – that of increasing fleet fuel economy to 54.5 miles per gallon for cars and light-duty trucks by Model Year 2025.

Building on the Obama administration's agreement for Model Years 2012-2016 vehicles, which will raise fuel efficiency to 35.5 mpg and begin saving families money at the pump this year, the next round of standards will require performance equivalent to 54.5 mpg or 163 grams/

mile of CO2 for cars and light-duty trucks by Model Year 2025.

Achieving the goals of this historic agreement will rely on innovative technologies and manufacturing that will spur economic growth and create high-quality domestic jobs in cutting edge industries across America.

These programs, combined with the model year 2011 light truck standard, represent the first meaningful update to fuel efficiency standards in three decades and span Model Years 2011 to 2025. Together, they will save American families \$1.7 trillion dollars in fuel costs, and by 2025 result in an average fuel savings of more than \$8,000 per vehicle.

Additionally, these programs will dramatically cut the oil we consume, saving a total of 12 billion barrels of oil, and by 2025 reduce oil consumption by 2.2 million barrels a day – as much as half of the oil we import from OPEC every day.

The standards also curb carbon pollution, cutting more than 6 billion metric tons of greenhouse gas over the life of the program – more than the amount of carbon dioxide emitted by the United States last year.

We also are looking to exploit advances in technology to help us fulfill our safety mission – that of saving lives on our highways. Emerging technologies offer us new opportunities to make great strides in safety.

When it comes to protecting the motoring public on the road, we know that the crashworthiness of vehicles is an essential element to help people survive crashes. But we also know that the vast majority of crashes occur because of risk-taking and dangerous behavior. I'm talking about drivers who make poor decisions, including driving drunk, driving while distracted, and driving too fast, to name a few.

NHTSA's National Motor Vehicle Crash Causation Survey showed that in about 95 percent of serious crashes driver error was attributed to the event that precipitated the crash. Our outreach to consumers in these areas is probably best known through our national high visibility enforcement campaigns to address safety belt use – *Click It. Or Ticket*, and our newly developed

campaign to address impaired driving - *Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over.*

And in the near future, perhaps, the vehicle may step in to help as well. Our Vehicle Communications program includes vehicle-to-vehicle, as well as vehicle-to-infrastructure applications. We are extremely encouraged by the research, analysis of the safety data, and the ongoing human factors work that all point to vehicle-to-vehicle as the next major safety breakthrough. In fact, vehicle-to-vehicle safety applications could address 80 percent of vehicle crash scenarios involving non-impaired drivers.

Data leads us to believe that we have the opportunity to apply these technologies in ways that could significantly reduce the number of crashes, injuries and fatalities on our roadways.

Vehicle-to-vehicle is one of the main focus areas of NHTSA's safety research program, and our plan is to have the research supply the data necessary to enable an agency regulatory decision in the 2013 timeframe.

Not only do we believe vehicle communication systems have the potential to save thousands of lives each year, we also believe that in their fullest form, they hold the promise of improving traffic flow –thereby reducing congestion and energy consumption.

The success of this program will ultimately rest on human factors and how the driver interacts with the system: the interface. The interface must produce a quick and appropriate reaction from

the driver, yet it cannot increase the potential for distraction.

Any new safety technology will be properly researched before it moves to implementation.

Vehicle communication safety applications must be effective at improving safety while not causing unintended consequences. The non-safety applications must be implemented so as not to increase the driver's workload or distraction which could increase crash risk.

The iPad I am using today tells you I'm a child of the information age and a bit of a techno-geek, but, I've got nothing on the generation of drivers coming up behind me. Their mobile devices are the lifeblood of that generation's entire social experience. This group demands to be connected at all times, and seemingly at all costs.

That cost includes more than 5,000 people killed in 2009 in Distraction-related crashes. Under Secretary LaHood's leadership, we are working to educate them about safety and distraction behind the wheel of a vehicle.

We are building momentum against Distracted Driving. In addition to reaching out to drivers, NHTSA is developing an evaluative framework for in-car technologies. Rather than react to every technology as it pops up and becomes a potential distraction, NHTSA needs a framework that clearly defines the danger zone for the driver — allowing us to keep pace with the industry and innovation, rather than playing catch-up.

That is why, as part of our NHTSA Distraction Plan we are taking a hard look at developing

guidelines and requirements for these systems. We have challenged the auto industry and the cell phone industry to work collaboratively with us to keep the driver focused on their required task: driving, and to keep them safe.

I believe we are putting the right framework in place to strengthen our Nation and our industry. The Department of Transportation will play an active role in helping the United States lead the world in the emerging fields of new technologies – including the safety and the greening of our passenger and commercial vehicle fleet.

These are promising times filled with opportunity for you and me to strengthen the

**economy, make gains toward protecting the
environment, and most importantly, to
protect our future. Thank you**

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