Remarks prepared for

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AASHTO

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"Motor Vehicle Crash Data Trends"

Thank you for the invitation to join you. It is a pleasure to be here. On behalf of Secretary LaHood and Administrator Strickland, I thank you for your interest in and support of traffic safety.

Highway safety is a complex problem and NHTSA has built a broad array of programs that address the causes of highway deaths. But traffic safety requires a comprehensive solution that includes the development and enforcement of strong traffic safety laws, safer vehicle design, safer roads, and safer bridges. It is an interconnected effort that can, over time, develop a national traffic safety culture.

Much of the progress we have made is predicated squarely on the safety partnerships NHTSA has established and maintained over the years, particularly with the States. We could not have made the progress we have without our State partners.

And this is true at the Department of Transportation level as well. Every operating mode at the Department of Transportation is fully engaged in the Secretary's drive to keep our transportation systems one of the safest in the world. We work together with our sister administrations, Federal Highways and Federal Motor Carriers, to achieve our mission.

The work you do in partnership with Federal highways is a logical extension of our work. For example, we are extremely encouraged by $1.27 billion in ARRA funds that were directed toward projects aimed at improving safety, including the hundreds of miles of rumble strips and cable median barriers you built.

And that is only the tip of the iceberg. All highway projects built with ARRA funds have been designed according to the latest safety standards, with many including wider shoulders, new and more effective guardrails, and bike and pedestrian facilities. Your partnership on Safety Edge is just the latest effort that will help us improve the quality of life in our country and improve the safety of the motoring public. Your work in highway engineering is essential to our work in saving lives.

For our part, NHTSA's work has been and will continue to be based on sound data. And the latest data we have tells us we're on target with our programs. The numbers are trending downward, and we are moving

aggressively to keep them headed in that direction. 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 on record since 1949. The fatality rate, too, is projected to be 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.

If we take a closer look at the 2008 and 2009 data we see that more than 70 percent of motor vehicle related fatalities were motor vehicle occupants. Motorcycle riders and non-occupants each account for roughly 13 to 14 percent of motor vehicle related fatalities.

We are encouraged that the number of fatalities is down for motorcycle riders in 2009, after several years of climbing. Looking forward, we're not sure if this is a trend yet for this group, but we will remain vigilant.

In fact, I can assure you that we will remain vigilant and proactive on all highway safety fronts. We will continue to develop a cross-section of programs that aim to reduce the number of fatalities for each type of crash victim with both Behavioral Safety Programs and Vehicle Safety Programs.

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 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 well-known through our national high visibility enforcement campaigns.

But it is clear that we cannot regulate or legislate risk away. It's already illegal to engage in any of these dangerous behaviors while behind the wheel, yet people continue to break the law.

So we are hopeful that we can harness technology to mitigate the effects of these risky behaviors. Let me start with alcohol. More than 10,000 people were killed in 2009 in Alcohol-impaired driving crashes.

In early 2008, under a $10 million cooperative research effort, NHTSA and the Automotive Coalition for Traffic Safety entered into a cooperative research agreement to look at in-vehicle technology to prevent alcohol-impaired driving. Through this effort, we are exploring the feasibility, understanding the potential benefits, and identifying the

public policy challenges associated with a more widespread use of in-vehicle technology to prevent alcohol-impaired driving.

To be successful, this technology will need to be non-invasive to the user; extremely accurate, precise, repeatable, reliable, durable and relatively inexpensive. We just recently completed a "proof of concept phase" and are planning to move forward to further explore the feasibility of developing technologies that potentially could be mass produced.

While there is still much work to do and implementation (if achievable) would be many years away, the early results are encouraging. And so, there may come a time, perhaps 8 or 10 years or so from now, when impaired driving has become a thing of the past; when vehicles themselves will prevent impaired drivers from harming themselves and others.

This will be a long-term effort – but we are hopeful it will produce a technology that is completely invisible to the driver and could be widely installed on a voluntary, market-driven basis. We are now moving this technology out of the laboratory and into test vehicles. If this technology proves effective, our task then becomes discussing this idea with the public.

If Administrator Strickland were delivering these remarks, he'd be working from his iPad. And I've been known to walk down the halls at DOT HQ with my head buried in my Blackberry. But, we've got

nothing on the generation of drivers coming up behind us. Their electronic gadgets, or should I say, 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.

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.

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. The 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 the crash risk.

Another priority for the Agency is assisting older drivers. I'm encouraged by our work to ensure that older drivers maintain their mobility, and that all individuals are allowed to continue to drive as long as they may safely do so.

We've reached out to licensing agencies to ensure that they have and use relevant information when making licensing determinations, and, most importantly, that licensing determinations are made based on the driver's functional ability and not his or her age. We are working with licensing agencies to adopt the *Driver Fitness Guidelines* released by NHTSA and the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators.

At the other end of the driver spectrum, we are working to reduce the risks to younger drivers. Young drivers lack experience, are unfamiliar with driving laws and situations, and, they take risks. NHTSA's approach to young drivers focuses on three parallel areas.

First, we want to reduce teen access to alcohol. Although teens are not allowed to consume any amount of alcohol, 19 percent of drivers aged 16 to 20 involved in fatal crashes in 2009 were legally impaired. We have to do better. And we are working with law enforcement, alcohol control boards, and the hospitality industry to make sure we do.

One of the most effective ways to help young drivers is Graduated driver's licenses. We are working with motor vehicle administrators,

educators, law enforcement, and parent organizations to promote the enactment and enforcement of effective graduated driver's licenses. GDLs, as they are known, allow young drivers to gradually gain the skills they need to safely operate their vehicles.

But even before we protect them as young drivers, NHTSA devotes a lot of resources to keeping children of all ages safe in vehicles. Among children under the age of 5, an estimated 309 lives were saved in 2009 by restraint use. Of these 309 lives saved, 284 were associated with the use of child safety seats and 26 with the use of adult seat belts.

At 100 percent car seat use for children under age 5, an estimated 372 lives (that is, an additional 63) could have been saved in 2009. All told, from 1975 through 2009, an estimated 9,310 lives were saved by child restraints – be they car seats or adult seat belts. Our Ease of Use Program was designed to help parents choose child restraints that they would be more likely to use and use properly.

However, the agency continuously strives to improve the safety of children because motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for children ages 3 to 14. Every day in the United States, an average of 4 children age 14 and younger were killed and 490 were injured in motor vehicle crashes during 2009.

NHTSA has identified several key initiatives and we are driving forward on all of them.

We are currently developing side impact performance requirements for testing the effectiveness of car seats at protecting children in side impacts.

We are developing a new consumer information program to help parents and caregivers find a car seat that fits in their vehicles. NHTSA's new Child Seat Fit Program should make it easier for parents to choose car seats that they know will fit in their specific vehicle. Vehicle manufacturers will be asked to voluntarily provide a number of options to consumers for car seats that have been installed in that vehicle model and have met all of the criteria for a proper fit.

Since all of the seats must meet the Agency's standards, we believe that consumers can make more informed choices on selecting child restraints based on the ease of use of the restraint and the fit in their specific vehicle.

We've also made it easier for parents and caregivers to register their car seats through our website, safercar.gov. Additionally, they can register with us to receive safety recall information as we publish it.

At NHTSA, we are committed saving lives on the American roadway. We have quite a roster of safety issues that we are working year-round. The loss of more than 32,000 people in traffic-related crashes in a single year represents a serious public health problem to our Nation.

We will not rest and we will keep working to drive that number down. NHTSA will keep making gains in lives saved by using all the tools at our disposal.

The Secretary of Transportation made safety a priority for the Department and he has delivered on that promise. As the highway traffic safety Agency, we take that duty seriously. Thank you.