

Opening Remarks
School Bus Occupant Protection: Taking Safety to a New Level
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Good morning, everyone.

Thank you all for joining us here today at DOT, and welcome to those of you joining us via the webcast. It's my pleasure to have so many passionate partners join us on the issue of school bus safety, and I thank you for taking the time to provide NHTSA with your expertise and experience in this field.

We've all heard the facts and the statistics before. You know that NHTSA is a data-driven agency. Of the 32,719 motor vehicle fatalities in 2013, 6 were school bus passengers. On average, from 2002 – 2012, 4 school-age children were killed each year while riding in a school bus during the school year.

By contrast, 490 school-age children were killed each year from 2002-2012 while occupants of other passenger vehicles. The data is clear: children are safer on school-buses than any other form of transportation.

But data-driven doesn't mean that we don't have to ask ourselves tough questions. The fact is – our children aren't data points. As someone who works in the school bus industry, the first question you're likely to be asked is, "Why aren't there seat belts on school buses?"

What DO you say to people when they ask? How do we justify all of our efforts to make sure that children are appropriately restrained from infancy in passenger vehicles, but not on the Big Yellow School Bus, the iconic vehicle designed to transport our most precious cargo?

This is an emotional issue. Despite data, despite science, despite fiscal constraints, this is a question that isn't going away. That's why we have to discuss safety belts on school buses. We owe it to ourselves to ask tough questions that go beyond data-points. I want to take the discussion beyond the historical compartmentalization and take a hard look at this issue.

You may have noticed from my time at NHTSA thus far, I like to be sure we look at things from different points of view. I think that's healthy. We've done this in some difficult areas, such as recalls, and it

generated some very constructive conversations and outcomes.

Addressing seat belts on school buses should be no exception.

I want you all to look at the issue with safety as the primary goal. I want to hear from you, our partners. First, you'll hear about NHTSA's school bus activities from Shashi Kuppa, followed by Dr. Kris Poland of NTSB. Later in the morning, we'll hear other stakeholder's experiences and perspectives.

After that, we will have a chance to talk about the challenges facing all of you – especially the school transportation directors. What are your perspectives? Manufacturers? What are your thoughts? What would it take to get safety belts on new school buses? What can safety advocates, many of whom are here today, do to help?

After lunch, the real work begins. That's where we get to hear your innovative thoughts on how to overcome those barriers. I look forward to a candid discussion. Again, thank you very much for being here.