



U.S. Department
of Transportation

**National Highway
Traffic Safety
Administration**

1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

March 4, 2020

The Honorable Roger F. Wicker
Chairman
Committee on Commerce, Science,
and Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am writing to you pursuant to Section 24401 of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act. This provision requires the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to publish on its website and file an annual plan for the following calendar year with the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, and Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation. The FAST Act requires NHTSA to provide information on its upcoming priorities and initiatives, rulemakings, guidelines, organizational restructuring, and working group and advisory committee activities. I am pleased to report on NHTSA's anticipated 2020 activities.

Priorities and Initiatives

NHTSA's mission is to save lives, prevent injuries, and reduce economic costs due to road traffic crashes through education, research, safety standards, and enforcement. NHTSA's priorities are structured around this mission while being responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars and reducing unnecessary costs and burdens to industry and the American consumer. The agency's efforts are data driven and based on sound science and engineering. This year marks NHTSA's 50th anniversary, providing us with an opportunity to reflect on the agency's work over the past several decades, while continuing to address current traffic roadway safety challenges. We are proud that over the past 50 years, the fatality rate has decreased dramatically, as have the percentage of fatalities caused by alcohol-impaired driving and the percentage of drivers who do not wear seatbelts. Our data shows that newer cars are safer cars, in large part because they have more advanced safety technologies, such as electronic stability control and automatic emergency braking (AEB). As consumer behaviors change and as vehicle technologies improve, there are many opportunities for NHTSA to further improve safety on our Nation's roadways.

NHTSA remains committed to the safe development and future deployment of Automated Driving Systems (ADS – SAE International driving automation levels 3-5). The agency is encouraged by the significant potential of the technology to improve roadway safety, by

potentially mitigating human error, as well as irresponsible and often illegal behaviors, that contribute to the majority of crashes on American roadways. In 2020, NHTSA plans to continue its work on ADS topics by: facilitating additional safety discussions with stakeholders; researching and developing safety performance measures and testing procedures for these technologies; and identifying unintended and unnecessary barriers to safety innovation within existing standards.

While NHTSA is interested in the promising safety benefits of ADS and other advanced technologies, the agency will continue to help consumers make more informed choices on safety performance when purchasing new vehicles. In 2020, the agency expects to request public comment on its plans to update the New Car Assessment Program (NCAP), including an evaluation of newer crash avoidance technologies.

Working with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, NHTSA expects to finalize fuel economy standards for passenger cars and light trucks produced in model years 2021-2026. NHTSA intends for the final rule to reflect a balance of safety, economics, technology, fuel conservation, and pollution reduction.

Throughout 2020, NHTSA will continue to enhance its vehicle recall management and defect identification processes, including improvements in its early warning reporting and data mining capabilities, so that safety trends are identified and addressed as early as possible. In addition, NHTSA will continue its efforts to raise public awareness about the importance of addressing safety recalls, leveraging multiple media platforms and partnerships. One area that NHTSA will explore in 2020 is providing additional grant opportunities for State motor vehicle authorities to notify owners of safety recalls during the vehicle registration process.

The agency will also continue to monitor industry's progress under its AEB voluntary agreement, as well as the newly announced commitment by various vehicle manufacturers to equip their new vehicles with rear seat occupant alert technology to address pediatric vehicular heatstroke deaths.

In addition, NHTSA will continue strategic investments in vehicle electronics and cybersecurity, advanced safety technologies, crashworthiness, ADS, alternative fuels safety, and behavioral safety research that further support the agency's research and mission. The agency held a public meeting in November 2019 to highlight its research agenda and seek feedback on planned projects and to identify potential information gaps and other emerging issues it should also take into consideration.¹

Through its ongoing State grant programs and targeted partnerships, NHTSA will continue to promote countermeasures that advance the safety of road users, inside and outside of vehicles. NHTSA continues to work closely with the State Highway Safety offices to promote the adoption of comprehensive, data-driven programs that offer potential or proven approaches to achieve State targets and national goals.

¹ <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/10/10/2019-22130/public-meeting-regarding-nhtsas-research-portfolio>.

Drug-impaired driving prevention continues to be a priority for the agency. After initiating a Drug-Impaired Driving Call to Action to seek input on research, policy and program needs to address this burgeoning issue, NHTSA will continue to raise awareness, educate partners and share best practices (including partners throughout the criminal justice system and in toxicology and data collection) and motivate State and local partners to focus on drug-impaired driving. NHTSA will continue to include drug-impaired and alcohol-impaired driving media campaigns throughout the year and as part of our impaired driving enforcement mobilizations. In addition, the agency plans to solicit the input of government and non-government entities outside of the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) on best practices related to both toxicology and criminal justice capacity and to help States evaluate their drug-impaired driving programs.

Emergency response and Emergency Medical Systems (EMS) are a core part of NHTSA's 50 years of success. EMS and 911 systems drastically improve outcomes when crashes occur. This year, NHTSA will explore ways to use vehicle-to-everything (V2X) communication technology to provide safer, faster, and more efficient EMS and other public safety agency response, and to equip vehicles as part of the future of connected safety technologies. Additionally, the agency plans to release an update to the 2009 *National EMS Education Standards* in late 2020, which will continue to be used by educators, certifying bodies and regulators to ensure entry-level EMS clinicians are prepared to provide high-quality medical care to injured and ill patients.

Rulemakings

In addition to finalizing fuel economy standards, NHTSA's regulatory priorities for 2020 include several rulemakings and other actions to advance the development of ADS technologies and to reduce unnecessary and unintended regulatory barriers to innovation, as well as numerous other rulemaking actions to increase safety and reduce economic burdens.² NHTSA is working to finalize a rulemaking that would allow for the deployment of adaptive driving beam headlamps. Additionally, the agency is also working on rulemakings to improve the safety performance of child car seats and on several tire-related rulemakings that will consider minimum wet traction standards and establish a new standard reference test tire.

Guidelines

In the pursuit of saving lives and reducing injuries on the Nation's roadways, NHTSA is committed to using all available tools and resources. NHTSA, like other agencies, issues guidelines on many topics after careful research and collaboration. NHTSA plans to seek public comment in the year ahead on updates to several of the uniform guidelines for State highway safety programs required by 23 USC 402(a). An update to the Cybersecurity Best Practices for Modern Vehicles is also expected. The agency also will work to develop guidance on consumer-facing standard terminology and nomenclature related to advanced driver assistance systems technologies to enhance consumer understanding of these

² See Fall 2019 Unified Agenda of Regulatory and Deregulatory Actions at: <https://www.reginfo.gov/public/do/eAgendaMain>.

The Honorable Roger F. Wicker

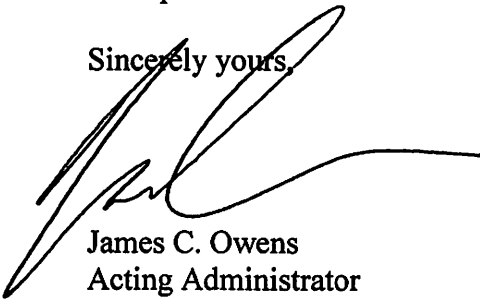
technologies across all manufacturing platforms. Finally, NHTSA is moving forward with the development and use of a web-accessible guidance portal that will create a centralized location for agency guidance on the internet.

Organizational Restructuring, Working Groups, and Advisory Committees

NHTSA has formed internal working groups and participates in Department-wide intermodal working groups to share information and coordinate activities on several priority topics, including connected vehicle technologies (V2X), rural road safety, large truck safety, vulnerable road user safety (e.g., pedestrians, bicyclists), and drug-impaired driving. On drug-impaired driving, NHTSA is also working with several government agencies outside DOT, including the Office of National Drug Control Policy and the U.S. Department of Justice.

Similar letters have been sent to the Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation; the Chairman and Ranking Member of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce; and to the Chairman and Ranking Member of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James C. Owens', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

James C. Owens
Acting Administrator