

Remarks Prepared for
David Strickland, NHTSA Administrator
NHTSA Workshop on Vehicle Mass-Size-Safety
Washington, DC
May 13, 2013

Thank you, everyone, for joining us today. I am so happy to welcome you to our second workshop on the effects of light-duty vehicle mass and size on fleet safety. Today's discussion is one of a series of workshops that NHTSA is sponsoring to help us share insights regarding these important issues.

[Why we are here today]

As you know, NHTSA and EPA have recently completed fuel economy and GHG standards for light-duty vehicles for model years 2017 and beyond. Both agencies are looking ahead to a mid-term evaluation, and NHTSA is looking ahead, to the next round of rulemaking, to develop and establish final standards for model years 2022-2025.

We're taking the long view throughout this process, and I'm confident that providing lead time and the certainty of a national program are essential to success—enabling manufacturers to meet strong standards that improve our nation's energy security and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

As you all know, we've already set standards for model years through 2021. The industry stood with us when we announced the 2012-2016 standards and the 2017 and beyond standards, and confirmed their willingness to rise to the challenge we set for them.

Make no mistake, the 2012-2021 standards are challenging. The industry is now working hard to meet them, and part of this effort includes the application of more new technologies than ever before.

Over the next several years, we will closely watch which technologies manufacturers choose to meet the increasingly stringent fuel economy standards. One approach that manufacturers may choose is to make lighter vehicles that consume less fuel.

We consider mass reduction, along with many other technologies, in evaluating what standards will be feasible in the future. Many OEMs have already announced that they intend to invest in vehicle mass reduction and in new, smaller vehicle designs as a way of meeting future standards.

NHTSA has been working with EPA, the Department of Energy, the California Air Resources Board, and other stakeholders on a number of issues, including the feasible amount of mass reduction and the effect of vehicle mass and size on safety.

We believe that more input is better and that bringing all stakeholders to the table ensures that the agencies have the best information available for their decision making. I know your expertise and insight will help inform the mid-term evaluation and 2022-2025 rulemaking.

[What questions are we trying to help answer through this and future workshops?]

If manufacturers are going to reduce vehicle mass or build smaller vehicles to meet future CAFE and GHG standards, we want to know ahead of time what is the feasible amount of mass reduction OEMs can achieve by the 2022 time frame, and whether there will be safety implications as a result, and if so, what those implications might be.

NHTSA has long been required by case law to consider the safety effects of CAFE standards, and EPA has the discretion to consider safety effects of GHG standards under the Clean Air Act.

Part of estimating potential safety effects is to understand how mass reduction is achieved, whether the mass reduction will lead to vehicle behavior changes in crashes, and whether those behavior changes will lead to changes in fatalities. The extent of mass reduction that manufacturers may be considering to meet more stringent fuel economy and GHG standards could raise different vehicle safety concerns than the industry has previously faced.

[We don't think these are straightforward questions]

We have to try to estimate in advance how mass reduction might affect the safety of lighter vehicles, and how those vehicles might affect the safety of drivers and passengers in the entire fleet. We're determining how much mass reduction we should consider in setting CAFE and GHG standards and evaluating how manufacturers are responding to standards we've already set.

We want to make sure that we're encouraging manufacturers to pursue a path toward compliance that is both safe and cost-effective.

[How have the agencies been trying to answer these questions?]

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, along with EPA, DOE, and the California Air Resources Board, have undertaken a number of studies to evaluate appropriate levels and techniques of mass reduction that manufacturers could consider for model years 2017 and beyond.

We're approaching these questions from two perspectives:

First, we're using a statistical approach to study the effect of vehicle mass reduction on safety historically.

Second, we're using an engineering approach to investigate how much mass reduction can be affordably and feasibly achieved while still maintaining vehicle safety and reasonable levels of other major functionalities such as noise, vibration, and harshness. These factors can have a significant impact on drivers' awareness of road conditions and on performance.

At the same time, we are studying the new challenges that lighter vehicles might bring to vehicle safety and the potential countermeasures available to effectively manage those challenges.

Today, our goal is to present results from the studies completed so far, obtain feedback, and solicit ideas about how the agencies should be considering these questions. NHTSA will continue to examine these issues as we approach the next round of rulemaking. We look forward to receiving as much input as possible on the completed studies, to help us refine our approach going forward.

Today we will hear from researchers who have done the engineering and statistical analyses. We have also invited OEMs, material suppliers, and safety specialists. There will be a lot of information shared, and you'll be hearing more detail about all of these studies today and tomorrow.

The overview is that NHTSA and the other government agencies have completed a number of studies in all major areas for vehicle mass reduction and safety analysis, and we're excited to receive input from stakeholders and the public.

Thank you. Have a productive day and enjoy the workshop!