

Remarks prepared for  
David Strickland, Administrator  
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration  
For  
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Prior Lake, MN  
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"A Stronger, Safer Transportation  
Future for Indian Country"

**Introduction**

Good morning. Thank you for inviting me to join you today for the National Tribal Transportation Conference.

It was only last year that I was here in Prior Lake for the Tribal Transportation Safety Summit. Apparently, I passed that audition because I've been asked back, and I'm honored by the invitation.

My remarks this morning will go a bit beyond what you might normally expect from a NHTSA administrator, but today I'm not only representing the agency that I'm proud to lead but also the Administration, our new transportation secretary, Anthony Foxx, and my colleagues at DOT. But don't worry: I will get to auto safety. I'll preach that gospel to anyone, anywhere, anytime.

**Government-to-Government Relationship**

First let me bring you this message from the Administration: we are committed to a true and lasting government-to-government relationship with Tribal nations. President Obama made that promise, and he's kept that promise.

The most visible evidence of this Administration's commitment is the White House Tribal Nations Conference, which will convene for the fifth time next month. Bringing together all 566 federally recognized Tribes is a clear and much needed break from the past. It's just one way that we're building a more respectful, more collaborative relationship to move us closer to our shared goals.

### **Building Infrastructure, Creating Opportunity**

High among those goals is transportation. We are committed to investing in transportation infrastructure and safety across the U.S. and in all Tribal communities. It's a priority because transportation is the backbone of the economy, driving growth, creating jobs, and providing more livable communities.

On its most basic economic level, every \$1 billion invested in public transportation supports and creates 36,000 jobs. That's a lot of bang for the buck.

But these investments deliver so much more. Transportation not only increases the mobility of people and products, it provides economic mobility in corners of the country too often left behind.

We know what happens in places without transportation options. Entire communities are cut off from jobs, services, and opportunity. It's a challenge to find or job or commute to one that might provide a higher wage. Your family struggles to access health care, which in rural America can be in the next county. And the world can't reach you either, so customers and their dollars can't help your business grow on Tribal lands or in small towns.

When transportation options are plentiful, however, communities spring to life. Jobs, health care, education, and other necessities begin to come within reach. That kind of connectedness is what we seek for Tribal lands and rural communities. These places can grow and thrive with smart transportation investments that are targeted to where they are needed most.

Over the last four years, we've worked hard to support better, safer roads and bridges on tribal lands.

Through the Recovery Act, we provided \$310 million for more than 500 projects.

Through the Federal Highway Administration, we've provided nearly \$1.5 billion to tribes for roads and bridges.

And last December, we provided \$15.5 million for 72 tribes to maintain or expand transit options while improving safety.

That's been our commitment. When Tribal communities have better, safer roads and bridges, Tribal communities can grow and thrive. It's not just about connecting Point A to Point B; it's about safely connecting Native Americans to economic opportunity.

## **TIGER**

That's certainly been the case when it comes to the TIGER grant program, which is just one of the ways we've supported tribal transportation priorities.

In our last TIGER round, we funded four tribal projects:

- The Oglala Sioux Tribe received a \$9 million TIGER grant to pave 17 miles of what is now gravel road in the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota.
- The Taos Pueblo community received a \$3 million TIGER grant to upgrade part of a two-lane road from Taos to Taos Pueblo.
- The Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe received a \$3 million grant to improve access to a popular recreation facility.
- And a \$2 million TIGER grant was awarded to a rural village on the Yukon River in western Alaska to pave almost 3 miles of gravel streets and dirt roads.

Across the five rounds of TIGER, tribal projects have received almost \$80 million in funding.

TIGER is, of course, a very competitive program. We always get far more applications than we can fund. Successful applicants in this and earlier rounds should be particularly proud. I know these funds are doing great things for your communities.

## **FHWA Discretionary Safety Program**

I can also pass along that FHWA recently completed its review of 240 tribal applications that are competing for \$8.64 million of FY 13 funding under the discretionary safety program. These applications should soon be in the hands of the Secretary, so look out for the announcement of successful applications in the very near future. We anticipate funding approximately 80 percent of the requests with all applicants receiving at least one project.

## **Every Day Counts**

FHWA and its TTAP (Tribal Technical Assistance Program) Centers are also helping tribal transportation agencies take advantage of the innovative strategies and technologies being advanced through Every Day Counts.

FHWA launched Every Day Counts several years ago to help transportation agencies deliver projects sooner and deploy technologies that can improve safety, save money and protect the environment. For example, FHWA is working with tribal agencies to introduce a new technology for bridge supports known as Geo-Synthetic Reinforced Soil or GRS.

FHWA is also working with tribes to use innovative forms of contracting that also save time and money. The sooner we deliver a project, the sooner it delivers benefits—including improved safety. And the money saved can be directed toward additional improvements. That's essential in a time when federal transportation dollars are scarcer than they should be.

## **Safety**

We're proud to partner with tribal communities to deliver transportation improvements that create jobs and foster opportunity. We need to be even better partners when it comes to safety. This is an area where we still have a long way to go.

At the NHTSA, we obsess about safety every day. We've designed programs that deal with both behavioral and vehicle-related causes of highway crashes, injuries, and

deaths—programs that save lives because they are based on accurate data, sound science, and careful engineering.

I might add that local communities are critical to our data collection efforts. Thankfully, only 30 miles away from here in St. Paul, law enforcement, EMS and highway safety officials from across the country are meeting to discuss how to further improve the accuracy of their data. It's essential work and we thank them for it.

NHTSA is also constantly working on improving vehicle design to help people survive crashes. We test vehicles. We recall cars that have problems. We set standards. And it makes a difference.

According to a NHTSA analysis of police-reported crash data estimates, design improvements between Model Year 2000 and Model Year 2008 cars helped save 2,000 lives and prevented one million occupant injuries in the 2008 calendar year alone.

We will continue our work to make vehicles safer, but must also address the fact that human error, risk-taking and dangerous behavior are significant contributors in the vast majority of highway crashes.

Too many drivers make the same bad decisions: They drive under the influence, drive too fast, fail to wear a seatbelt, or fail to secure their young children using a car seat or seat belt.

Many drivers, and especially young people, are also distracting themselves by using mobile devices behind the wheel when their only focus should only be on the road.

These and other human errors contribute to 90 percent of all highway crashes. I'm particularly concerned by what the data tells us about Native American drivers and passengers.

Today, seat belt use is 86 percent nationwide. That's far too low. Yet among Native Americans seat belt use falls to 68.5 percent.

In 2011, 55 percent of passengers killed in a car crash were unrestrained. Among Native Americans, two-thirds of those killed were unrestrained at the time of the crash.

We know that rural communities face different and often tougher challenges when it comes to safety. Speeds are higher; roads are less forgiving; visibility is lower at night; belt use is lower because people don't feel the risk of being pulled over; rollovers are more common in pickup trucks and SUVs; emergency response times are longer.

That said, I do not accept that we can't drive down these unfortunate and tragic safety statistics and make rural and Tribal roads safer.

Impaired driving is the perfect example of the challenges facing rural communities. We know that rural communities have fewer resources and more ground to cover to combat DWIs. Much as is the case with seat belt enforcement, too many drivers just don't feel as likely to get caught. But we're working together to extend law enforcement's reach in rural communities so that they can keep intoxicated drivers off the road.

BIA provided Tribes with four mobile breath testing units—called BAT mobiles—to address the limited availability of breath testing equipment and holding facilities. That means officers can spend more time on DWI patrols and at check points, which was a need identified by a Tribal Law Enforcement Advisory committee. More patrols and more check points mean less drunk driving, and that's a better outcome for all of us.

In addition to being deployed during the National Impaired Driving Crackdown around Labor Day each year, these units are also used to support the "Don't Shatter the Dreams" high visibility enforcement mobilization and awareness campaign conducted during the December holidays each year. This campaign was created by Native Americans to encourage Tribal support and participation. More than 40 Tribes participate in this campaign each December.

Safety enforcement in rural America and tribal lands will always present different challenges than we find in more densely populated communities. But we can still make a real difference and save lives by influencing behavior.

Another approach that can help rural communities is the collection of data. Tribes that develop solid data collection systems can use the data to review and analyze their own

crashes. The data will lead you to solutions when you seek to address any of the behaviors most likely to cause fatalities and injuries on your roads.

At NHTSA, we're working with other Federal partners to offer more coordinated programs and resources to support Tribal Traffic Safety and Injury prevention efforts. By developing partnerships with agencies such as the BIA, Indian Health Services, CDC, and FHWA who are already charged with providing services and support to Tribal communities, we can more effectively and efficiently provide technical assistance and opportunities to share evidence-based best practice information.

One avenue recently used to share best practices was the National Lifesavers Conference, which included workshops addressing Native American issues and initiatives. NHTSA, along with BIA, Indian Health Services, CDC, and FHWA sponsored Tribal representatives to participate and share their experiences for the past three years.

I know that safety will be the focus of some of your breakout groups tomorrow and during the week. I look forward to the feedback from these sessions. We're doing a lot of the right things on safety but we clearly have a long way to go. Your input is an essential part of making our roads safer across Indian Country, and I hope you'll share with NHTSA the great ideas the conference will generate.

### **Close**

Before I leave you and you get back to the work of the conference, let me just take a moment to thank you for all of your work in your communities.

No matter your role in Tribal transportation, you're helping to pave a pathway to a better, more prosperous future for your communities.

When a new bridge spans a river, maybe a school bus can take a shorter route to and from school, which means the kids get to spend more time learning, playing and spending time with their families.

When a series of gravel roads become modern, paved streets, bad weather doesn't wash them away, which means storms don't stop businesses in their tracks and residents can get to and from work.

When a one-lane road is made safer and wider, maybe a business along the way can better move their goods and services, attract customers, expand, and create new jobs.

No, your mission isn't just asphalt and steel, buses and trains. It's about people's lives. It's about our economy. It's about stronger communities.

So, on behalf of Secretary Foxx and all of my colleagues at DOT, thank you for your commitment to Tribal communities. Thank you for your hard work. And thank you for inviting me today. I wish you all the best on what I know will be a productive conference.

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