

**Remarks prepared for  
David Strickland  
Administrator  
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration**

**World Traffic Safety Symposium  
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Good morning. It is a pleasure to be here. I confess. I'm a bit of a motorhead and the auto shows are fast becoming a favorite part of my job. And I truly appreciate what you've done here by holding the Safety Symposium in conjunction with your auto show.

I'm grateful for the spirit of collaboration and partnership that makes it so...it's a collaboration that was born 20 years ago, and since then, this Symposium has tackled a wide range of traffic safety issues including child passenger safety, driver distraction, multicultural barriers, the aging driver, smart technology and safe design, and protecting children.

What's more, even though New York and New Jersey are among the highest performing States in belt use, death rates, and impaired driving, you continually do more to push for safer roads. Congratulations to both States for enacting not only bans on texting, but also hand-held cell phones.

You get it. You understand the development and enforcement of strong traffic safety laws, over time, creates a traffic safety culture. Leandra's Law in New York aimed at protecting children from impaired drivers and Kyleigh's Law in New Jersey, aimed at protecting novice drivers, are both critical pieces of your communities' safety picture.

Highway safety is a complex issue, and it demands collaboration. It can only work if each of us at the Federal, State and local level steps up to do our part—independent, yet integrated—saving lives on our roads and highways.

The President is committed to doing his part as well. He has proposed a transformative U.S. transportation policy that improves public health and safety, fosters livable communities, promotes infrastructure repair and long-term economic competitiveness, while achieving environmental sustainability.

The Nation's first Livable Communities Initiative, developed by the Department of Transportation in coordination with the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Environmental Protection Agency, will measurably enhance the quality of life for families, workers, and communities across America.

This translates into Federal support for more transportation choices, more public transportation, and more commercial and residential development around transportation hubs.

That includes roads, rails, and transit and safer passage for pedestrians and bicyclists. On March 15, the Secretary announced a new policy on bicycle and pedestrian safety that clearly states that every transportation agency, including DOT, has the responsibility to improve conditions and opportunities for walking and bicycling and to integrate these modes into their transportation systems.

The Department is actively promoting increased travel by foot and bicycle to reduce congestion, pollution and reliance on oil, and improve traveler's health.

As with motor vehicle transportation, we are making every effort to promote pedestrian safety. To support these efforts, we have awarded major demonstration projects to New Mexico, North Carolina, Florida, and Chicago to implement comprehensive pedestrian safety programs that include infrastructure improvements and contain strong education and enforcement components over the next three years. We hope that these projects will serve as a model for other States, cities and communities.

With this national safety framework in place, efforts made at the vehicle level will be that much more effective.

As anyone who has strolled the show floor upstairs already knows, new technologies offer great hope for safety in the future. Vehicle-based technologies such as Forward Collision Warning Systems and, Lane Departure Warning Systems will provide drivers a little extra help when they need it most.

Later this year, we will begin to encourage the demand for and use of these technologies. Other technologies such as those capable of detecting vulnerable road-users such as pedestrians and cyclists show great promise.

We are looking at the future safety benefits of vehicle-to-vehicle communications, or V2V. NHTSA has entered into a cooperative agreement with an industry partnership including Ford, General Motors, Honda, Hyundai-Kia, Mercedes-Benz, Nissan, Toyota, and Volkswagen that will develop and evaluate the effectiveness of safety systems that use vehicle-to-vehicle communications. We're in the second year of a 4-year effort that is part of the Department's Intelligent Transportation Systems Program.

This project will ensure that vehicle communications are interoperable across all vehicles regardless of make or model. The effort will also help us determine the minimum performance levels and safety impact of safety applications enabled by V2V. NHTSA believes this technology has the potential to save thousands of lives each year while at the same time offering the opportunity to reduce congestion and provide other services to vehicles owners.

But technology can work against us, as well. Drivers and other road users must take an active role in safety—their own and that of those sharing the road. Vehicle occupants need to buckle up and keep focused on the task of driving. Technologies may be able to detect the presence of vulnerable road users, but both they and the vehicle drivers need to be on the lookout for each other.

Take for example, the issue of distracted driving.

When Alexander Graham Bell uttered the first words ever spoken over a telephone: “Mr. Watson, come here. I want you.” He had no idea the world he would help create. Look at us now—we’re all packing Blackberries and we absolutely refuse to be disconnected—even for one minute.

Has it made us more productive at work? Undoubtedly. Has it made us better communicators? I think the jury is out on that one still. The jury is definitely in on cell phone use and driving—be it for texting or talking or whatever else. Distracted Driving is dangerous – almost 6000 lives lost in 2008 alone – and we are determined to put an end to it.

In fact, I can tell you, the Secretary of Transportation is on a rampage about Distracted Driving. Last fall, the Department held a summit on Distracted Driving. It was the first in the Nation to call Federal attention to this dangerous problem, and propose a range of realistic solutions.

We recently unveiled sample legislation that States can use as a starting point to craft laws prohibiting texting while driving. Hopefully, this will help all the State legislatures currently considering such laws to move forward.



So far, 21 States plus D.C. have texting laws covering all drivers – Iowa became the 21<sup>th</sup> State earlier this year. That’s a good start, but we’ve got to do better. I know lawmakers around the country are studying this seriously.

We’re seeking 50 million dollars in next year’s budget for an incentive grant program to encourage more states to pass these laws.

And in Syracuse, New York and Hartford, Connecticut, we just kicked off a two-year federally funded pilot program to test the effectiveness of highly publicized law enforcement efforts to change drivers behaviors and get them to put down their cell phones.

On the outreach side, we’re sponsoring a website, [distraction.gov](http://distraction.gov), which acts as a national clearinghouse for information on distracted driving. It also makes our position on Distracted Driving clear, and it details our commitment to work across the spectrum with private and public entities as well as advocacy groups to tackle Distracted Driving.

I am very encouraged by the momentum that is building against Distracted Driving. My intent is for NHTSA to develop an evaluative framework for in-car technologies. We are in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and I guarantee there will be new whiz-bang gadgetry for in-vehicle use every week. Rather than react to every technology as it pops up and becomes a distraction, NHTSA needs a framework that clearly defines the danger zone for the driver — allowing NHTSA to keep pace with the industry, rather than playing catch-up.

We will not take a back seat while new telematics and *infotainment* systems are introduced. These have too great a potential to create more and more distraction for the driver. We will be taking a hard look at guidelines or requirements for these systems. NHTSA will challenge the auto industry and the cell phone industry to work collaboratively with us to keep the driver focused on their required task: driving.

Having said that, I must also say technology alone will not solve our safety problem, and that to achieve significant improvements in safety will require changes in both technology and driver behavior. I believe the intersection of behavior modification and technology enhancement provides tremendous potential for continued and accelerated improvement in highway safety performance.

At NHTSA, we are very hopeful that technology will make a big difference in the fight against impaired driving. In early 2008, NHTSA and the Automotive Coalition for Traffic Safety entered into a cooperative research agreement to explore the feasibility, potential benefits, and public policy challenges associated with a more widespread use of in-vehicle technology to prevent alcohol-impaired driving.

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. Our task then, becomes selling this idea to the public.

And we have a good track record of reaching out to consumers. We do it for safety ratings for vehicles, Child Passenger Safety, Teen drivers, etc.

I will leverage NHTSA's resources and knowledge in this crucial area to initiate and broaden the safety dialog with consumers to include new topics and concerns.

Three weeks ago, the Secretary released numbers that show a continuing dramatic reduction in the overall number of highway deaths.

Our analysis projects that traffic fatalities have declined for the 15<sup>th</sup> consecutive quarter, and will be 33,963 in 2009, the lowest annual level since 1954. In terms of lives lost per 100 million vehicle miles traveled, the number of deaths dropped to 1.16, again the lowest level on record.

Are we winning the battle? Not yet. The loss of more than 33,000 people in traffic-related crashes in a single year represents a serious public health problem to our Nation. We will not rest until that number is zero. My goal for this Agency is to make sure that we keep making gains in lives saved by using all the tools at our disposal.

We will continue to support our law enforcement partners with national campaigns and other resources in the fight against drunk driving. We will continue to encourage States to expand and improve their ignition interlock programs as part of a comprehensive approach to combat drunk driving. Drunk driving is one of our nation's deadliest crimes, and we are committed to eliminating it from our roadways.

We will continue to work closely with law enforcement and State and local safety advocates promoting seat belt use. The simple seat belt has saved more lives than any other technological invention ever implemented in vehicles. And even though seat belt use is at an all-time high across the country, we still have work to do.

The Secretary of Transportation made safety a priority for the Department during his confirmation hearing last year, and he has delivered on that promise. As the highway traffic safety Agency, we are on point and we take that duty seriously. Thank you.