

Remarks prepared for
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“Safety Advocacy Critical to Saving Lives”

Good morning. It is a pleasure to be here and to see all of you who play such an important role in highway safety. Your work is extremely valuable, and makes a vital contribution to our safety efforts at NHTSA.

Over time, NHTSA has built a broad array of programs that address the varied causes of highway deaths, and we have made great progress in improving safety. Much of this progress is predicated squarely on the safety partnerships we've established and maintained over the years, particularly with the States. The Motor Vehicle Administrations are each critical players in that safety collaboration and we could not have made the progress we have without you.

As Motor Vehicle Administrators, you interact with drivers – the parents, the teens, the seniors – every single day. You really work the front lines of providing both education to drivers and licenses which allow individuals to drive. You have direct access

and we know you have influence with drivers. Your ability to help instill safe driving behavior and raise awareness of safety issues with the driving public makes you safety advocates in your communities.

Take the example of driver records... records that are updated quickly provide better information for judges when they are dealing with potential problem drivers and when they are considering sentencing options. Let's pledge to work together with judges, prosecutors and probation personnel to make the driver histories an accessible tool for the court system to use in protecting communities from chronic unsafe or drunk drivers.

Driver histories are not just about documenting offenses, they are key to identifying and promptly dealing with problem drivers before they, or someone else become a victim of their unsafe behavior. There will be future benefits as well – and I'll get to those in a moment.

You are a key to one of most urgent highway safety problems - improved motorcycle safety. Riders must have the proper licenses (endorsements) to operate a motorcycle. Licenses should then be linked with registrations, and, DMVs can remind motorcyclists of the necessity of being properly licensed. We are asking you to step up on this issue. We need your leadership to help drive these numbers down.

Again, your record-keeping on novice drivers and your support for effective graduated driver licensing laws and link to drivers education is extremely important. AAMVA and NHTSA have recommended components for effective laws. States with strong nighttime and passenger restrictions, for example, have lower novice driver crash rates than states with weak restrictions. Your offices see and deal with these novice drivers, and their parents, on a daily basis. We need you to speak out on what works and doesn't work with GDL, seek improvements to your existing law and work with police

agencies to ensure these young people face strong, ongoing enforcement before they become a tragic statistic.

We'd also like to see you help publicize and enforce the laws you do have. As I mentioned, you have the ability to reach parents at an important moment...when their teenager gets a driver's license. Parents, novice drivers and law enforcement need to be aware of specific GDL restrictions and the importance of compliance with these restrictions.

You can also help us in the fight to stop impaired driving, and for the increased use of ignition interlocks for convicted drunk drivers. We partner with court professionals and organizations like MADD in this effort, and we'd like to work with you.

Interlocks are very effective in preventing repeat drunk driving offenses, but they are underutilized. Let's work with our administrative hearing officers, prosecutors and judges to expand the use of these life-saving devices and stop drunk drivers from putting our family, friends and neighbors at risk.

Help us publicize national, state or local sobriety checkpoint campaigns. Checkpoints are effective – but only if the driving public knows about them. Additionally, we would like to see you publicize and support zero tolerance laws for our younger drivers – because they have proven effective in driving the numbers of deaths on our highways down.

We will continue to do our part. When it comes to protecting the motoring public on the road, we know that the crashworthiness of vehicles is an essential element to help people survive crashes. But we also know that the vast majority of crashes occur because of dangerous behavior. Drivers who make poor decisions, including driving drunk, driving while distracted, and driving too fast, to name a few.

NHTSA's National Motor Vehicle Crash Causation Survey showed that in about 95 percent of serious crashes the event that precipitated the crash was driver error. . Our outreach to

consumers in these areas is well-known through our national high visibility enforcement campaigns.

But it is clear that we cannot regulate or legislate risk away. It's already illegal to engage in any of these dangerous behaviors while behind the wheel, yet people continue to break the law.

So we are hopeful that we can harness technology to mitigate the effects of these risky behaviors. Let me start with alcohol. More than 10,000 people were killed in 2009 in Alcohol-impaired driving crashes.

In early 2008, under a \$10 million cooperative research effort, NHTSA and the Automotive Coalition for Traffic Safety entered into a cooperative research agreement to look at in-vehicle technology to prevent alcohol-impaired driving. Through this effort, we are exploring the feasibility, understanding the potential benefits, and identifying the public policy challenges

associated with a more widespread use of in-vehicle technology to prevent alcohol-impaired driving.

To be successful, this technology will need to be non-invasive to the user; extremely accurate, precise, repeatable, reliable, durable and relatively inexpensive. We just recently completed a “proof of concept phase” and are planning to move forward to further explore the feasibility of developing technologies that potentially could be mass produced.

While there is still much work to do and implementation (if achievable) would be many years away, the early results are encouraging. And so, there may come a time, perhaps 8 or 10 years or so from now, when impaired driving has become a thing of the past; when vehicles themselves will prevent impaired drivers from harming themselves and others.

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. We are now moving this technology out of the laboratory and into test vehicles.

Secretary LaHood gave you an update on our efforts to combat Distracted Driving. If Administrator Strickland were delivering these remarks, he'd be working from his iPad. And I've been known to walk down the halls at DOT HQ with my head buried in my Blackberry. But, we've got nothing on the generation of drivers coming up behind us. Their mobile devices are the lifeblood of that generation's entire social experience. This group demands to be connected at all times, and seemingly at all costs.

That cost includes more than 5,000 people killed in 2009 in Distraction-related crashes. As you heard earlier, under Secretary LaHood's leadership, we are working to educate drivers, especially novice ones, about safety and distraction behind the wheel of a vehicle.

In addition to reaching out to drivers, NHTSA is developing an evaluative framework for in-car technologies. Rather than react to every technology as it pops up and becomes a potential distraction, NHTSA needs a framework that clearly defines the danger zone for the driver — allowing us to keep pace with the industry and innovation, rather than playing catch-up.

That is why, as part of our NHTSA Distraction Plan we are taking a hard look at developing guidelines and requirements for these systems. We have challenged the auto industry and the cell phone industry to work collaboratively with us to keep the driver focused on their required task: driving, and to keep them safe.

And in the near future, perhaps, the vehicle may step in to help as well. Our Vehicle Communications program includes vehicle-to-vehicle, as well as vehicle-to-infrastructure applications. We

are extremely encouraged by the research, analysis of the safety data, and the ongoing human factors work that all point to vehicle-to-vehicle as the next major safety breakthrough. In fact, vehicle-to-vehicle safety applications could address 80 percent of vehicle crash scenarios involving non-impaired drivers.

Data leads us to believe that we have the opportunity to apply these technologies in ways that could significantly reduce the number of crashes, injuries and fatalities on our roadways. Vehicle-to-vehicle is one of the main focus areas of NHTSA's safety research program, and our plan is to have the research supply the data necessary to enable an agency regulatory decision in the 2013 timeframe.

And ideally, in the future, your driver license databases could be tied to a vehicle-to-vehicle technology smart enough to adjust its crash avoidance response to suit a young driver differently than a senior driver. Who knows what role

technology can ultimately play – if we have the information to tell it what to do.

The success of any technology in a vehicle will ultimately rest on human factors and how the driver interacts with the system: the interface. The interface must produce a quick and appropriate reaction from the driver, yet it cannot increase the potential for distraction.

We are very encouraged with the initial deployment of Automatic Crash Notification Systems that can automatically notify EMS and other first responders if the driver can't. And now we, along with our partner the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, are looking very closely at *Advanced* ACN, that can notify not only when and where, but also predict injury severities so that first responders can tailor the best response and care for any injured vehicle occupants. We are actively pursuing research on these helpful technologies.

Another priority area we have asked you to help us with is assisting older drivers. I'm encouraged by our work to ensure that older drivers maintain their mobility, and we are determined that all individuals are allowed to continue to drive as long as they may safely do so.

We ask that you ensure your agencies have and use relevant information when making licensing determinations, and, most importantly, that licensing determinations are made based on the driver's functional ability and not his or her age. We would like your states to adopt the *Driver Fitness Guidelines* released by NHTSA and AAMVA.

Another tool we're moving on is the Data Driven Approaches to Crime and Traffic Safety, or DDACTS. The Agency worked with our colleagues in the Department of Justice to develop a program to combat both crime and traffic crashes. By using DDACTS, jurisdictions can use geo-mapping to pinpoint areas

with both high crime and traffic crashes, and then target existing resources to these areas.

Demonstration sites across the country are already using the DDACTS approach, and early evidence suggests it works. These sites have seen a reduction of crashes and crime. NHTSA and DOJ are actively promoting the DDACTS approach to other communities and providing technical assistance.

I can tell you that under the leadership of Secretary LaHood, the Department of Transportation continues to be laser-focused on safety. We will continue our broad range of programs to make safer vehicles and change risky driver behaviors.

And we will continue to support you and work with you as you help us save lives on our nation's highways. Through your

safety advocacy, you play a critical role in improving your communities and keeping our nation's motorists from harm.

Thank you.

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