

**ORAL STATEMENT OF
RONALD MEDFORD
DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR
NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION**

**BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SURFACE TRANSPORTATION
AND MERCHANT MARINE INFRASTRUCTURE,
SAFETY, AND SECURITY
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE,
AND TRANSPORTATION
U.S. SENATE**

Hearing on
Ensuring the Safety of Our Nation's Motorcoach Passengers

March 30, 2011

Chairman Lautenberg, Ranking Member Thune, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to update you on the activities of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) on the issue of motorcoach safety.

I want to offer my sincere and deepest sympathy to those who lost loved ones in the recent horrific crashes that occurred in New Jersey and New York. They have our commitment that we will continue our work to improve the safety of motorcoaches.

NHTSA is responsible for conducting research on vehicle safety and developing and enforcing standards for all newly manufactured vehicles that use our roadways. In addition, we are responsible for ensuring that vehicles and vehicle equipment that have a safety defect are identified and recalled. The motorcoach safety work is a priority safety effort for U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood and NHTSA Administrator David Strickland.

Under the leadership of Secretary LaHood and Administrator Strickland, we have been working aggressively to improve motorcoach safety.

In 2009, at the direction of Secretary LaHood, NHTSA worked with other modal administrations in the Department of Transportation (DOT) to develop a comprehensive systems-oriented safety strategy for enhancing motorcoach safety.

The crash data indicated that the highest risk of fatalities resulted from vehicle rollover, often resulting in occupant ejection. Seventy-five percent of all motorcoach fatalities from 1998 to 2008 were a result a rollover and ejection. NHTSA used this data to establish its highest priorities. The three high-priority actions identified in the plan are seat belts, electronic stability control, and roof strength. We have initiated a rulemaking to require seat belts in all seating positions on new motorcoaches, and we have completed research on rollover structural integrity and electronic stability control systems and plan to propose safety standards for these issues this year.

NHTSA has also made significant progress in several other important areas related to new motorcoaches. We have also issued a proposal to upgrade the safety standard for commercial tires, including those used on motorcoaches. Research on motorcoach emergency exits, lighting and signage, and egress rates is complete and we are evaluating the results in order to make a decision whether to initiate rulemaking later this year. Other safety areas covered by our research and rulemaking efforts include improving fire safety, and enhancing data collection and analysis through the use of event data recorders.

Mr. Chairman, NHTSA shares your desire to complete the actions that are identified in the DOT motorcoach plan. We are devoting a significant portion of our research and rulemaking resources to this important safety issue. You have Secretary LaHood's and Administrator Strickland's commitment to completing the work on various motorcoach safety programs as quickly as prudently possible by ensuring that our work is grounded in sound engineering and science.

The recent tragic crashes in New York and New Jersey that resulted in a large number of deaths and serious injuries highlight why we must act quickly on motorcoach safety. We recognize that these vehicles carrying so many of our Nation's citizens have the potential in a single crash to injure and kill a large number of people. That is why we have placed such a high priority on improving the safety of these vehicles.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for your consideration and this subcommittee's ongoing efforts to improve highway safety. I would be pleased to answer any questions.

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