

**Remarks Prepared for**  
**Ron Medford**  
**Deputy Administrator**  
**National Highway Traffic Safety Administration**

**National School Transportation Association**  
**Fly-In and Spring Meeting**  
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Good afternoon. Thank you for the invitation to be here. Last month, 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. This was almost a 9 percent

drop in fatalities in one year, and this followed a 10 percent drop the year before.

We are very encouraged by the numbers, but, we must do more. 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.

As you know, the work we do at NHTSA touches on a broad spectrum of programs. We believe that these programs are making a difference in saving lives and reducing injuries to the American public. Our programs deal with both the behavioral and vehicle-related causes of highway deaths.

And, we devote a lot of time and energy to the lynchpin of all our programs: good data, good science, and careful engineering. In the past few years alone the Agency has issued rulemakings on Electronic Stability Control, Side Impact Protection, Roof Crush Resistance, and Heavy Truck Tractor Stopping Distance—all of them informed and shaped by good data and good science.

Later this year, the upgrades to our Government 5-Star Safety ratings program will go into effect with the 2011 vehicle Model year. These upgrades include Child Seat Ease of Use Ratings, Child Seat Fit Information, an upcoming Combined Crashworthiness Rating, and a new crash avoidance technology rating program.

The Agency has a full slate of safety programs and I'm sure many of you are wondering about our new Administrator—David Strikland, and what plans he might have for NHTSA. I think you'll find David committed to keeping NHTSA a very active agency. When he was sworn in three months ago, the first thing he tackled was the question of NHTSA's authorities. He felt it was important to look at whether there was a need to improve NHTSA's effectiveness in this era of the global marketplace and rapidly changing technologies. One of the first questions he asked was whether NHTSA is being well-served by the four vehicle statutory authorities it relies on to regulate.

The reality is that while the current authority works and the various constituencies have learned to work with them, they were written in the 1960s and 1970s, when the world and the vehicle market were profoundly different. The answers he is looking for is whether NHTSA's statutory authorities accommodate the modern vehicle and the modern competitive marketplace.

And very importantly, do they allow us to regulate in a way that allows the industry to build and sell safe products that the consumer wants to drive? Do they allow us to promote safety, innovation, and fuel efficiency while still providing effective regulatory and enforcement oversight? And do they allow NHTSA to move at pace with the industry? Our legal and program staff is taking a hard look to answer these questions – and to make their best recommendations.

Revisiting our authority is a tremendous opportunity for us. It's an opportunity to serve the public, the industry, and the safety community better. And, we are inviting you to talk to us. Tell us what you think would help make the process clearer or more

logical. The door is open at NHTSA. Please take us up on this invitation.

Your invitation for me to be here today gives me the opportunity to catch you up on where NHTSA is on school buses and motor coaches. Let me start with school buses.

School buses are among the safest vehicles on our nation's highways. Children are safer in the big yellow bus than they are walking, biking, or riding in a passenger car to school.

In fact, every year, approximately 800 school-aged children are killed in motor vehicle crashes while traveling to and from school. Every year, approximately 474,000 school buses travel 4.8 billion miles to transport 25.1 million children to and from school and school related activities. Only 5 of these fatalities are school bus passengers and 14 are pedestrians. The other approximately 780 deaths occur in passenger vehicles or to other pedestrians, bicyclists, or motorcyclists.

We also know that most school bus passenger fatalities are because the passenger's seating position was in direct line with the crash forces and seat belts would not have prevented these fatalities. The school bus fatality rate of 0.23 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles travelled (VMT) is significantly lower than that for passenger cars (0.92 per 100 million VMT).

We want to make sure that we encourage ridership in school buses. And that was one of the primary motivators behind the final rule to upgrade the passenger protection requirements for school buses we published 2008. We believe that States and local school districts are better able to analyze school transportation risks particular to them and identify approaches to best manage and reduce these safety risks.

We do not want to require seat belts if the added cost of installation reduces ridership, since this would increase the risks to children that no longer would have access to school bus transportation. If they decide that seat belts are in their best interest, they should have a program in place to ensure that belts are worn properly. As you know, child occupant protection in

large school buses is provided via “compartmentalization” which is a protective envelope formed of strong, closely spaced seats that have energy absorbing seat backs.

NHTSA is continuing its current policy of making available Section 402 funds to purchase seat belts on school buses. In addition, Section 406 Safety Belt Performance Grant Funds can also be used to fund the incremental portion related to the purchase and installation of seat belts on school buses.

Other changes to school bus crash protection regulations made under this rule included increasing the seat back height from 20 to 24 inches above the seating reference point, requiring small school buses, GVWR $\leq$ 10,000 lbs, to be equipped with lap/shoulder belts instead of the current lap belts, and establishing requirements for voluntarily installed seat belts on large school buses, GVWR $>$ 10,000 lbs.

Now I know that many of you in this room today also have an interest in motorcoach safety. Motorcoach safety is a high-profile issue for NHTSA. Though motorcoach crashes may be

relatively rare, when they occur they can cause a significant number of fatalities and serious injuries in a single event. And there has been an increase in the average number of annual motorcoach fatalities in the past 10 years; the five-year average number of fatalities in 2008 is 3 times that in 1998.

NHTSA is investigating methods to reduce the number of fatalities in motorcoach crashes. Ejections account for 64 percent of motorcoach passenger deaths, and, we are working on several priority safety areas to mitigate these losses.

I'd like to review for you some of NHTSA's action items to improve motorcoach safety. The agency developed a plan in August 2007 that identified the most effective methods to reduce fatalities and injuries in motorcoach crashes.

In 2009, NHTSA worked with other modal administrations in the Department of Transportation to develop a systems-oriented safety strategy for enhancing motorcoach safety. The DOT motorcoach safety plan is based on a two-pronged approach:

- Address the root cause of motorcoach crashes: driver fatigue, inattention, and medical condition, and the oversight of unsafe carriers.
- Address the root cause of fatalities and injuries: vehicle rollover, occupant ejection, structural integrity, and fires.

At NHTSA we identified priority strategies in the area of occupant protection and crash avoidance, and I can tell you the following:

On the issue of the installation of seat belts in all seating positions: We conducted the first-ever motorcoach crash test in 2007, and then, during 2008-2009 we conducted sled tests and static tests to develop performance requirements for seat belts on motorcoaches. We anticipate the publication of a notice of proposed rulemaking this summer.

Improved rollover structural integrity is another priority area for motorcoaches. In February of 2008, we conducted motorcoach roof crush/rollover testing to compare existing school bus and

European requirements for rollover structural integrity. In July of last year, we conducted a verification rollover test with a newer motorcoach model to develop performance requirements for motorcoach structural integrity in rollover events. We expect to announce our regulatory decision later this year.

During the last two years, we have been looking closely at Electronic stability control systems. During 2008 and 2009, we examined roll and yaw stability of motorcoaches with and without ESC for different steering maneuvers to develop candidate test procedures and performance metrics. We plan to announce our regulatory decision later this year.

We are also examining the area of improved tire performance and expect to publish a notice of proposed rulemaking upgrading the performance of tires used on commercial vehicles, including motorcoaches this year.

In the area of improved emergency evacuation, we completed motorcoach emergency egress research at the Volpe research center in January, and anticipate completion of the feasibility

assessment, development of performance requirements, and to make decision on regulatory action this summer.

In the priority area of improved fire safety, we began a motorcoach flammability research and test program with the National Institute of Standards and Technology and expect completion of the assessment on the development of more stringent flammability and fire detection requirements for motorcoaches next year.

And finally, in the area of Event Data Recorders, we expect the publication of SAE recommended practice for heavy vehicle EDRs by this summer, and we expect to make a decision on a requirement to install EDRs on motorcoaches by June.

As users of our nation's roadways, motorcoach drivers must also be aware of the growing momentum against Distracted Driving. Technology is a fantastic tool and NHTSA is a great believer in its potential safety benefits. 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. In the

future, there will be technologies 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.

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.

The Department is using its existing authority to prohibit commercial interstate truck and bus drivers from texting while driving, using a handheld cell phone, or other device.

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.

We look forward to constructive engagement with all of you as we collectively move to address the safety challenges for motorcoaches and school buses on our nation's highways.

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.