

Remarks prepared for

Ronald Medford

Deputy Administrator

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Opening Address

SAE Government/Industry Meeting

Washington, D.C.

January 26, 2011

Good morning. Thank you for the invitation to be here. This government industry forum is a great way to start the year and I look forward to our discussion today. This is an important week for transportation in Washington: the TRB annual meeting, this SAE/Government Industry Meeting and the Washington Auto Show – are all happening this week - it is a trifecta for transportation.

It has been a very busy year for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. And even though a few of the issues we are involved with make splashy headlines, the roster of issues we on work year in and

year out is large and ranges widely across both the vehicle and behavioral aspects of traffic safety.

The guiding principle in all our work is the protection of the American public. And under the leadership of Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood and NHTSA Administrator David Strickland, I believe we have energized the Agency and reached new levels of service and protection for the public.

And as we look to the future and the work that we know is in front of us, we are hopeful that President Obama's plan for a robust six-year reauthorization of

America's transportation will quickly work its way through Congress. The changes in Washington and the increasing concern about our deficit mean we face a few hurdles. But, in the past, transportation policy was one area where members of both parties joined together in the common good. Secretary LaHood is optimistic that reauthorization will happen this year.

NHTSA's work has been and will continue to be based on sound data. And the latest data we have tells us we're on target with our programs. In 2009, highway deaths fell to 33,808, the smallest number since 1950. Fatality and injury rates fell to the lowest levels ever recorded. Our projections for the first 6 months of

2010 show fatalities are down more than 9 percent from the same period in 2009.

This is great news, but we must remain vigilant and continue to work hard. We are moving forward on all fronts because we know what we've been doing is working well. In September of last year we released two reports that detail the thousands of lives saved by highway safety programs and equipment. We estimate that seat belts saved more than 72,000 lives during the five years between 2005 and 2009, while child restraint systems and minimum drinking age laws saved hundreds more during 2009.

Any highway safety discussion about the future has to acknowledge the issue of Distracted Driving, and it has been one of the Department's most visible programs in the last two years. Some recent headlines might lead you to believe we have sacrificed resources and programs to combat distracted driving, but I can tell you that is not the case. I think it's appropriate to reaffirm what Secretary LaHood said last week: "We will not be deterred by the false choice between addressing distracted driving on the one hand and alternative critical safety issues on the other. When it comes to driver, automobile, and roadway safety, we

will not take a back seat to anyone. We can and must address all three simultaneously.”

For proof, we can point to the numbers. From 2005 to 2008, distraction-related fatalities as a proportion of all traffic fatalities jumped from 10 percent to 16 percent. In 2009, for the first time in four years, that percentage leveled off. That leveling off coincided with our national anti-distracted driving campaign, other public education efforts, and an increasing number of state anti-distracted driving laws.

Thanks to our pilot programs, I think we have a very strong enforcement message. We can prove that good laws coupled with tough enforcement and targeted communications can reduce deadly distracted driving behavior. In April of last year, we launched “Phone in One Hand, Ticket in the Other” in Hartford, Connecticut and Syracuse, New York.

After the second of four planned waves of program implementation, we found hand-held cell phone use had dropped 56 percent in Hartford and 38 percent in Syracuse; and texting while driving had declined 68 percent in Hartford and 42 percent in Syracuse.

That tells us that – although distracted driving is still a massive epidemic – our efforts to raise public awareness, enact tough laws, and step up enforcement can make a difference and save lives.

We're moving forward in some other areas and I'd like to tell you where we are with some of the other anti-distraction pieces. The Department has twice now, brought together experts and advocates for national summits. We've produced Public Service Announcements and maintained a strong dialogue with the media.

We have made it clear that all of these actions are the beginning stages of the solution, or solutions, needed to raise awareness and sharpen the consequences for those who choose to drive distracted.

An estimated 20 percent of the 1.52 million injury crashes in 2009 involved distracted driving.

Distractions, such as cell phones and texting, are enticing and readily accessible and may be a factor in crashes involving younger drivers, especially those less than 20 years old. But drivers of all ages are at risk.

NHTSA, along with a number of safety and enforcement groups, and manufacturers, developed sample legislation that States can use as a starting point to craft laws prohibiting texting while driving. Eleven states took that step last year.

So far, 30 States plus D.C. and Guam have texting laws covering all drivers. That's a good start, but we've got to do better. I know lawmakers around the country are studying this seriously.

We're taking steps to obtain more accurate and better data to define the size and nature of crashes related to distraction. We're looking at improved crash and citation data through enhanced police reporting. We are looking to various technology solutions, as well, including cell phone filters or blocker systems as well as systems that can detect distracted driving and warn the driver. Lastly, we are developing manufacturer's guidelines for in-vehicle communication systems.

In terms of keeping those potentially distracted drivers safe, let me talk a bit about our efforts in the Department's Intelligent Transportation Systems Program (ITS) – and specifically about the Vehicle-to-

Vehicle Communication Program. This program is researching vehicle communications technology to enable vehicle-to-vehicle (V2V) safety systems as well as vehicle-to-infrastructure (V2I) connectivity.

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 currently in the second year of a 3-year effort with this group.

This project will ensure that vehicle communications are interoperable across all vehicles regardless of make or model. The effort will also help us to determine the minimum performance levels and safety impact of safety applications enabled by V2V. We believe 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.

We are also looking to technology to help us solve other safety problems. For example, even though drunk driving is at an all time low, it still accounts for about a third of traffic fatalities. Thus, we are actively

seeking new methods and tools to combat impaired driving before it happens.

In early 2008, NHTSA and the Automotive Coalition for Traffic Safety entered into a cooperative research agreement to explore the feasibility, the potential benefits of, and the public policy challenges associated with a more widespread use of in-vehicle technology to prevent alcohol-impaired driving.

We are seeking to develop technologies that can accurately and reliably detect alcohol impairment and prevent impaired drivers from operating their vehicle. Rather than only focusing on police detecting and

arresting impaired drivers on the road, this effort seeks to prevent impaired driving from occurring by preventing drunk drivers from operating the vehicle.

This will be a long-term effort – but we are hopeful it will produce a technology that is invisible to the driver and could be widely installed on a voluntary, market-driven basis. The technology is called DADSS, for Driver Alcohol Detection System for Safety. I want to applaud the auto industry for stepping up to the plate the co-sponsor this important research with us.

We're also developing and promoting an approach called Data-Driven Approaches to Crime and Traffic

Safety, or DDACTS . The Agency worked with the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance and the National Institute of Justice to create this location-based crime and traffic data tool that helps establish effective and efficient methods for deploying law enforcement and other resources.

DDACTS uses geomapping to identify areas that have high incidences of crime and crashes, so law enforcement agencies can apply their resources where they are needed most. NHTSA provides technical assistance and workshops to help enforcement agencies implement the program. This program has been extremely successful in pilot testing in

communities in Maryland, Louisiana, and Kansas.

You can expect a more aggressive rollout of this program in 2011.

As you know, in 2010 we enlisted NASA engineers with expertise in areas such as computer controlled electronic systems, electromagnetic interference and software integrity to help evaluate what role, if any, electronics played in reports to NHTSA of unintended vehicle acceleration in Toyota vehicles. We also asked the National Academy of Sciences – an independent body using scientific experts - to examine the broad subject of unintended acceleration and electronic vehicle controls across the entire automotive industry.

I know there is a lot of interest in the results of these two studies and all I can say at this time is: stay tuned.

We've also been busy on the fuel economy front.

Working with the Environmental Protection Agency, we delivered on the President's call for a strong and coordinated national policy for fuel economy and greenhouse gas emission standards for motor vehicles, and we did so in a way that does not compromise safety. We issued the final rule on April 1st last year.

That rule set the first-ever national program that harmonized fuel economy and greenhouse gas

standards for light-duty vehicles for model years 2012 through 2016 – an historic step in addressing the transportation sector’s largest contributor to oil consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. The impact is huge – light-duty vehicles are responsible for about 60 percent of U.S. transportation petroleum consumption.

Although very important, that was just the first step.

We’re working to advance the second-phase joint rulemaking for light-duty vehicles. The President directed NHTSA and EPA to work with the California Air Resources Board (CARB) to begin a process for evaluating vehicle technologies and vehicle

manufacturer capabilities to improve fuel efficiency for the passenger fleet for model years 2017 to 2025.

To meet this objective, we have met with a wide range of stakeholders, including automobile manufacturers, labor unions, environmental organizations, and others, as part of the process to develop a technological assessment and to seek their views about our future regulations.

NHTSA and EPA have now issued a Notice of Intent to begin developing new standards for future light-duty vehicles. Together with the State of California,

the two agencies also released an Interim Joint Technical Assessment Report.

The technology assessment considers electric vehicles – including hybrid electric vehicles, plug-in hybrid electric vehicles, and Battery Electric Vehicles. It identifies how electric vehicles can be an important part of the vehicle mix that will likely be used to meet more stringent fuel economy and GHG emission standards in the future.

And Monday of this week, along with EPA, and the state of California, the Department of Transportation announced a single timeframe for proposing fuel

economy and greenhouse gas standards for model year 2017-2025 cars and light-duty trucks. Proposing the new standards on the same timeframe - by September 1, 2011 - signals continued collaboration that could lead to an extension of the National Program, providing automakers certainty as they work to build the next generation of clean, fuel efficient cars.

Improving fuel efficiency will save consumers money at the pump, reduce America's dependence on foreign oil and cut emissions of harmful pollutants and greenhouse gases.

EPA and NHTSA have also proposed the first national standards to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions

and improve fuel efficiency of heavy-duty trucks and buses. This comprehensive program is projected to reduce GHG emissions by nearly 250 million metric tons and save 500 million barrels of oil over the lives of the vehicles produced within the program's first five years.

The innovative technologies fostered by this program will also yield economic benefits, enhance energy security, and improve air quality. New technologies include widespread use of aerodynamic improvements and tire rolling resistance, as well as engine and transmission upgrades.

I've briefly touched on some of the more high-profile items on the NHTSA agenda. I could talk about many more, including, motorcoaches, motorcycles, crash avoidance technologies, child passenger safety, tires, or seat belts. Every aspect of our work is important, and we will continue to focus on making our Nation's roadways safer for the American public. Thank you.