

Remarks prepared for
Ronald Medford, Deputy Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
For
Vision Zero: Best Practices for Safer Roads from
Sweden to the United States
Washington, District of Columbia
October 28, 2010

**I'd like to extend a special greeting to our host,
Swedish Ambassador Jonas Hafström, and to all of
our colleagues, guests, ladies and gentlemen.**

**As today's panelists have made clear, road safety and
achieving a Vision Zero is a complex undertaking that
requires a variety of strategies—tailored to the
different traffic safety risks of each nation. I am
encouraged by this information exchange, because it is
critical that we in the global community put forth our
best practices so that other nations may take full
advantage of lessons learned and advancements
already made elsewhere.**

We each have unique situations in our respective nations. In many countries, the national government is the final arbiter of highway safety law. But in the United States, each one of the 50 States has the right to establish its own highway safety laws for the protection of its citizens. We in the Federal government work closely with the individual States' highway safety agencies on the various safety issues to show them what works and what doesn't work, but ultimately, they decide which laws to enact, and which safety programs to support. In Sweden, your task may be simpler as you only have to deal with the one authority.

I am extremely encouraged by the Memorandum of Cooperation Sweden and the United States signed in the field of Sustainable Transportation. Through exchanges of experts and scientific and technical information, seminars, workshops and research, we jointly hope to increase our level of cooperation with each in the areas of intermodal transportation, transportation safety, accessibility for the disabled and environmentally friendly vehicles, and other, mutually beneficial topics.

I'd like to start by sharing our recent good news on highway safety with you. In the United States, the rate of deaths on our roadways continues to decline. In

2009, highway deaths fell to 33,808, the smallest number since 1950. Fatality and injury rates fell to the lowest levels ever recorded. And this progress comes even as Americans drove a greater number of miles than ever before.

Highway safety is a complex problem and NHTSA has built a broad array of programs that address both behavioral and vehicle-related causes of highway deaths. So while safe vehicle design certainly plays an important role in increasing road safety, it is but one part what needs to be a comprehensive traffic safety solution that includes the development and

enforcement of strong traffic safety laws that can, over time, develop a national traffic safety culture.

Much of the progress we have made in the United States is predicated squarely on the behavioral programs and safety partnerships NHTSA has established and maintained over the years. We could not have made the progress we have, for example, to deter impaired driving, increase child passenger safety, increase the use of seat belts – or any road safety issue, without a robust behavioral component.

With that said, we believe that vehicle design has certainly played an important role in increasing road

safety. And we see great hope for safety in the future through the deployment of safety technology. NHTSA is doing some fairly exciting work on vehicle-based technologies such as Forward Collision Warning Systems and Lane Departure Warning Systems that provide drivers a little extra help when they need it most. Other technologies such as those capable of detecting vulnerable road-users such as pedestrians and cyclists also show great promise.

For example, 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 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 Intellidrive 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 benefits 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 drivers.

As many of you may know, beginning with the 2012 model year, every vehicle sold in the United States will be equipped with Electronic Stability Control. We expect this technology will save up to 10,000 lives a year when fully implemented. We feel it is the most important vehicle safety technology since the introduction of the seat belt.

There are many safety challenges to discuss, and any highway safety discussion about the future absolutely has to acknowledge the issue of Distracted Driving.

The jury is definitely in on cell phone use and driving—be it for texting or talking or whatever else.

Distracted Driving is dangerous – from 2005 to 2008, distraction-related fatalities as a proportion of all traffic fatalities jumped from 10 percent to 16 percent. As many of you may know, Secretary LaHood has been on a crusade against Distracted Driving.

An important part of our comprehensive approach to the problem includes potential technical solutions to the problem. So 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.

Our data will help point us to the appropriate solutions, but right now, we are looking to various technology solutions, including technologies that detect cell phone use in motion or blocker systems that can warn the driver. And, we are looking at developing manufacturer's safety guidelines for in-vehicle technologies, including the emergence of in-vehicle communication systems.

Our intent is to develop an evaluative framework for in-car technologies. Rather than react to every technology as it pops up by a car manufacturer and becomes a distraction, we are taking the lead rather

than a backseat while new telematics and *infotainment* systems are introduced.

We are concerned about the potential these systems have to create more and more distraction for the driver. As part of our NHTSA Distraction Plan we will be taking a hard look at federal guidelines or requirements for these systems. And we are challenging the auto industry and the cell phone industry to work collaboratively with us to keep the driver focused on their required task: driving

We see technology as a valuable resource in the fight against impaired driving, as well. In addition to

encouraging the use of Ignition Interlocks for drivers convicted of DUI, NHTSA has partnered with automobile manufacturers on a research project to develop a non-intrusive, inexpensive, and reliable technology that can determine whether a driver is impaired.

DADSS, for Driver Alcohol Detection System for Safety, can also prevent an impaired driver from operating a vehicle. This is a 5-year, \$10 million effort. We are in the third year and we are making some progress. But, there is much more difficult research and development work still to be done.

Technology is a key component of our enhanced Consumer Safety program. Earlier this month, NHTSA rolled out an enhanced 5-Star Safety Ratings for new vehicles. The enhancements we rolled out are designed to raise the bar on safety for the future automobile and for the protection of the American Public.

Beginning with the 2011 model year, earning a 5-Star Safety Rating became that much tougher for new vehicles. We've added a side pole crash test. This test simulates a car or truck crashing sideways into a narrow object like a utility pole or a tree. We want

cars and trucks to offer better head protection in these kinds of real-world crashes.

To learn more about injuries that can occur in frontal and side crash tests, we've upgraded our family of test dummies. We're now using improved crash test dummies of differing sizes that tell us better information about potential injuries. We added small-sized adult female dummies and a new medium-sized adult male dummy. As part of the frontal crash tests, we'll be collecting injury data on additional areas of the body, including head, chest, neck, and legs.

That injury data will help us strengthen the information we provide to consumers so they can have a more comprehensive view of the relative safety of a new vehicle.

One of the most significant changes is the addition of an Overall Score for each vehicle tested. We responded to feedback we received from consumers who wanted to know how vehicles rated overall.

The Overall Score combines the results of the frontal crash test, side crash tests and rollover resistance tests and compares those results to the average risk of

injury and potential for rollover of other vehicles. You can use this score to compare vehicles for overall relative safety.

And an important piece of the program is designed to encourage the use of advanced vehicle technologies.

Beginning now, we will promote the safety advantages of three systems. The three crash-avoidance systems are: electronic stability control (ESC), forward collision warning (FCW), and lane departure warning (LDW) systems.

We will continually add technologies to our recommendations as they develop and prove themselves.

Earlier this year, NHTSA, working with the Environmental Protection Agency, delivered on President Obama's call for a strong and coordinated national policy for fuel economy and greenhouse gas emission standards for motor vehicles. As with any change, there will be new challenges that arise.

For example, as we move to hybrid electric vehicles in an effort to diminish our reliance on oil, we are creating a much quieter fleet. A quieter fleet could

potentially put pedestrians at risk, especially blind pedestrians. NHTSA is currently conducting a research program on quieter cars and the safety of blind pedestrians.

Our initial analysis shows that hybrid electric vehicles do have a significantly higher rate of pedestrian crashes than internal combustion engine vehicles for certain maneuvers—like slowing or stopping, backing up, entering or leaving a parking space and making a turn.

We're in Phase 2 of this research and evaluating how we might require vehicles to emit a base level of sound

at low speeds to provide some level of identification to pedestrians that a vehicle is approaching. We think that to be effective, this sound has to be readily identifiable as a vehicle.

But even as we move on the potential safety issues of quieter vehicles, we are moving forward on the technology that powers them. NHTSA initiated a research program to assess the safety performance of Lithium-ion (Li-ion) batteries.

Lithium-ion batteries are used in Hybrid Electric Vehicles, Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicles, and Battery Electric Vehicles. We are moving to establish

minimum safety performance standards for these batteries during storage, charging, normal use, vehicle collision, and post vehicle collision events.

Traffic safety is at the core of a free and dynamic global community. We must work together to ensure the safety of our people when they travel the roadways of any country – be it their home or not. We must continue to explore the use of advanced vehicle technologies as a resource for potentially saving thousands of lives every year. Exchanges like this workshop are an important forum to ensure we work in harmony on this critical safety issue.