

**Remarks Prepared for
David Strickland, Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
The Conference of Minority Transportation Officials
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[INTRODUCTION BY HELEN MC SWAIN]

Thank you, Helen, for that generous introduction. I am privileged to be here among so many colleagues in the transportation arena. I am honored to speak to all of you this morning.

I stand here today as the second African-American Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety

Administration. My predecessor, Jerry Curry, broke that new ground and served from 1989 to 1992.

And I want you to understand how privileged I am to be working every day to make the roads safer for everyone across this country.

At NHTSA we are relentless in our focus on safety and our core mission: to save lives, prevent injuries, and reduce the economic costs of road crashes. But none of us can avoid the fact that persistent behavioral issues continue to exact a disproportionately heavy toll in our African-American, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian American communities.

Take seat belts: From 1999-2009, more than 33,000 African Americans were killed while traveling in passenger vehicles. Of these, 64 percent were not restrained at the time of the crash, compared to the

overall national figure of 57 percent. In Hispanic neighborhoods during the same period, 37,000 occupants of passenger vehicles died and 58 percent were not wearing seat belts.

Among Hispanics and African Americans, our data also shows that the proportion of children (aged 12 and younger) who were unbelted and killed in passenger vehicle crashes was higher across that age range than the national percentage. Also, from 2005-2009, Hispanics and African Americans were found to have almost twice the proportion of pedestrians killed in motor vehicle traffic crashes than whites and four percentage points higher than the national proportion. The tragedy here—and the opportunity—is that these fatalities can be avoided through better decisionmaking.

We all have a lot of work to do. At NHTSA, we're testing new automotive technology, boosting fuel economy, and helping to create economic opportunities and livable communities. But our primary job is safety, and we strive for excellence in our commitment to save lives.

Traffic safety involves a complex assortment of issues and challenges, and NHTSA has built a broad array of programs to address the causes of highway crashes. Our work requires a comprehensive solution that includes the development and enforcement of strong traffic safety laws, safer vehicle design, public education, and safer roads. We also partner with vehicle manufacturers, state officials, numerous safety organizations, and international colleagues to save lives and prevent injuries.

NHTSA's diverse programs and initiatives emerge from data-driven research activities that touch on every aspect of driving safety. Our work is based on sound data, and the latest data tells us we're on target with our programs.

I'm pleased to report that US traffic fatalities have been steadily declining over the last five years since reaching a near-term peak in 2005. Highway deaths have decreased by 26 percent from 2005 to 2011. However, the fact remains that 32,885 people were killed in motor vehicle traffic crashes in 2010 and 2,239,000 were injured. Those numbers are unacceptable and we're working aggressively to reduce them.

NHTSA's National Motor Vehicle Crash Causation Survey shows that in about 95 percent of serious crashes the event that precipitated the crash was attributed to

driver error. I'm talking about drivers who are speeding, driving while intoxicated, or driving while distracted (texting or talking on a cell phone). In response, NHTSA has developed high visibility national efforts to change unsafe driving behavior. We combine good laws with effective enforcement and a strong information education campaign. For example: Our annual "Click It Or Ticket" effort to encourage seat belt use and our most recent initiative to reduce distracted driving, "Phone in One Hand, Ticket in the Other."

Through our research and regulatory actions, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is working to create a new safety era that will revolve around safer vehicle designs and emerging technologies. We conduct rigorous crash testing of new vehicles and research compelling technical advances, such as collision imminent automatic braking, electronic

stability control, and lane departure warning. We are also currently testing the next generation of vehicle-to-vehicle communications (V2V) technology that could prevent a majority of crashes from ever occurring.

I want to speak for a moment about NHTSA's efforts to increase fuel efficiency and provide communities with more transportation choices. We're especially proud of these initiatives because they are going to provide long-term benefits for the nation.

In July 2011, President Obama announced an historic agreement with 13 major automobile manufacturers to increase fuel economy standards each year from 2017 to 2025. The Administration has estimated this would require 54.5 miles per gallon equivalent for cars and light-duty trucks by Model Year 2025, if all of the

improvements are made with fuel economy-increasing technologies.

Transforming our vehicle fleet into a more fuel efficient fleet will conserve energy, help protect the environment, and reduce our dependence on imported oil.

After three decades without significantly raising fuel-efficiency requirements, NHTSA and the Environmental Protection Agency have developed the first-ever national program that harmonized fuel economy and greenhouse gas standards for light-duty vehicles for model years 2012 through 2016.

Under those standards, we estimate that passenger cars and light trucks would be required, on average, to increase from 27.6 miles per gallon in 2011 to 34.1 miles

per gallon in 2016. The impact of this increased fuel efficiency is huge because light-duty vehicles are responsible for about 60 percent of U.S. transportation petroleum consumption.

We have also proposed fuel efficiency and greenhouse gas emissions standards through model year 2025. DOT and the EPA worked closely with auto manufacturers, the state of California, environmental groups, and other stakeholders to help ensure that the standards we proposed are achievable, cost-effective, and preserve consumer choice.

These programs—combined with the model year 2011 CAFE standards and together spanning model years 2011 to 2025—are expected to dramatically cut the amount of oil we consume and the carbon pollution we generate from cars and trucks.

The Department of Transportation is also a partner in another long-term project that will help the nation work toward sustainable prosperity, especially in our underserved communities. The Administration’s Livable Communities Initiative will measurably enhance the quality of life for families, workers, and neighborhoods across America. The Department of Transportation, Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Environmental Protection Agency are collaborating on a number of key initiatives:

- First, we’re providing more transportation choices, with public transportation and commercial and residential development planned around transportation hubs: roads, rail, transit—and new opportunities for people to walk or bike to their destinations. These initiatives are designed to**

lower household transportation costs, improve air quality, and reduce our nation's dependence on imported oil.

- **We're also expanding affordable, energy-efficient housing choices for people of all ages, incomes, races, and ethnicities to increase mobility and lower the combined cost of housing and transportation.**
- **There is support for economic competitiveness—through improved access to employment centers, more educational opportunities, and services to meet workers' basic needs.**
- **We're targeting federal funding for existing communities—through such strategies as transit-oriented, mixed-use development and land recycling—to increase community revitalization and improve the efficiency of public works investments.**

- **We're aligning federal policies and funding to remove barriers to collaboration, to leverage funding, and increase the effectiveness of government planning for future growth—including smart energy choices and locally generated renewable energy.**
- **Finally, we're working to enhance the unique characteristics of all communities by investing in healthy, safe, and walkable neighborhoods—in cities, suburbs, and rural areas.**

I want to end with a few words about the renewal of the automobile industry and how rapidly it has recovered from the devastating economic downturn. When President Obama took office, America was mired in a recession that hit the auto industry particularly hard. In the year before the President's inauguration,

the industry lost more than 400,000 jobs. In the span of a few months, one in five American autoworkers received a pink slip and two great American companies—Chrysler and GM—stood on the brink of liquidation.

The President made a swift and focused response. He said that if GM and Chrysler were willing to take the difficult steps of restructuring and making themselves more competitive, the American people would stand by them. And we did.

As the Secretary of Transportation noted recently, until last year, the United States hadn't added manufacturing jobs since 1997. Now, America's auto industry has reinvented itself for the 21st century. And our manufacturing sector has spearheaded the economic recovery—adding jobs in both 2010 and 2011. Many of

these jobs directly follow from the investments of foreign auto manufacturers.

In late May, *USA Today* reported that a number of US auto plants were working at maximum capacity to meet the demand for new vehicles.

- The Chrysler Group plant in Detroit, which makes the Jeep Cherokee, was working overtime five days a week and many Saturdays. They added 1,100 jobs on a third shift. Chrysler also added 1,800 workers in Belvidere, IL, to make the new Dodge Dart.**
- Volkswagen added 800 workers to enable VW's plant in Chattanooga, TN, to run 20 hours a day, six days week, making Passat sedans.**
- Hyundai added a new shift of 877 at its plant in Montgomery, AL.**

- **Toyota reported that most of its plants were using overtime and Saturday shifts, and that they were adding more than 1,000 jobs at five US plants.**

And just last week I toured the largest Volvo truck manufacturing facility in the world—the 300-acre New River Valley Plant, which employs 1,800 people in Dublin, VA. It’s gratifying to see the renewed energy and momentum in our industry.

So, again, I do appreciate the opportunity to speak to all of you. I think we really have entered a dynamic period of investment and innovation that’s going to strengthen our economy and provide new opportunities in the future. Thank you again and have great conference.