

**Remarks prepared for  
David Strickland, Administrator  
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration**

**Clinton Presidential Center and Library**

**Transportation in the Clinton Years:**

**A Period of Innovation, Vision & Vigilance**

**Panel Session: The Future Challenges of Transportation  
Mobility**

**Little Rock, Ark.**

**June 17, 2011**

**“Shaping Individual Mobility”**

Good afternoon. Thank you for the invitation to be a part of this forward-looking discussion. From my perspective, mobility challenges must always be framed in the context of safety. How we will protect the public in the future? How do we, as the Highway Safety Agency, support tomorrow's drivers? How can we give them a better understanding of the changes occurring in the automobiles they are buying and driving? How do we make them accepting of incredible changes going on under the hood of their car?

I'd like to give you an example of the opportunity and the challenges we face with technological possibilities, behavior and consumer acceptance.

We have been working for decades on improving seat belt usage rates, and we have been very successful over the past few years, now with a belt rate of 85 percent. But before getting the changes via high visibility campaigns, strong laws and good law enforcement, the first attempt was a technology solution, the seatbelt interlock. While working on SAFETEA-LU, I heard more member horror stories of the interlock than I care to share. Ultimately, the belt interlock was a failure. Drivers took efforts to circumvent it, and eventually it was withdrawn and NHTSA was treated to a legislative limitation in pursuing that type of solution.

But now, with belt usage being more widely accepted, a number of manufacturers are interested in seatbelt interlock strategies, especially if they can use an interlock to waive the passage of the unbelted occupant protection test. If drivers and passengers were certain to be belted, crashworthiness designs and airbags could be maximized to better protect the belted driver.

But because of the objections by the driving public, a real evolutionary jump in safety was made that much more difficult to attain.

Some of the biggest issues America faces today, and for the foreseeable future, involves the auto industry. Rising fuel prices, energy independence, global warming and environmentalism, the wireless world...all of these issues touch the auto industry in some way.

To that, we add the ever-present challenge of keeping Americans safe every time they get behind the wheel – no matter how far they have to travel or how many other vehicles are on the roads at the same time.

In fact, we believe the auto industry has crossed the threshold into a safety era that will revolve around technologies that will step up and assist the driver – up to and including technologies that can prevent crashes from happening in the first place.

NHTSA took the lead on this when we rolled out our enhanced government 5-star safety ratings system with the 2011 model year vehicles.

Among the things we changed – We added a family of crash test dummies and a side impact pole test. We established an overall safety score that will combine the star ratings from the front, side, and rollover programs. And, we implemented a program that we hope will encourage the demand for and use of advanced crash avoidance technologies.

The key to the success of our 5-star ratings system has always been a communications program to tell the American public what it all means. As we move to the future, we want them to understand the whys and wherefores of the changes we've made, and that some of the new ratings being lower than before, do not mean the vehicles are less safe than they were a year ago.

Most importantly, we want the consumer to embrace crash avoidance technologies as a way to make them safer. We want terms like electronic stability control, lane departure warning, and forward collision warning to become part of the consumer's vocabulary and comfort zone.

And as vehicles continue to evolve, we will keep pace with that evolution and continue to tell the American public what it all means.

Until we get there, and for the foreseeable future, however, cars and people will still be involved in crashes. So we will continue to work toward better protection for special populations such as elderly occupants and children. We are all getting older, and as we age our bodies become less able to withstand crash loading, and less able to recover from injuries. We will be working on improving injury prevention and survivability for older occupants.

We can only guess at some of the new and demanding challenges ahead. Some of them have been looming. There is little doubt that we're meeting at a tipping point when it comes to how we power our cars. For a century, Americans planned and paved a transportation system that reflected a single, unquestioned assumption – the belief that the world's supply of cheap oil was endless.

Today, we know this just isn't true. Gas prices have soared and families feel the pain at the pump. They pay more for transportation than for food, education, health care, or anything else in the household budget besides housing. Other imperatives – like responsible stewardship of our air and climate – are on Americans' minds like never before.

Fuel economy and emissions standards will be a driving force in vehicle design for the next decades and beyond. Cars and trucks will likely be lighter, and designers and engineers will have to consider new materials and manufacturing methods to implement these changes. And, of course, we will maintain the high level of safety that we all worked so hard to achieve.

Similarly, electric vehicles have an important role to play in our continued goal of increasing fuel efficiency and decreasing greenhouse gas emissions. Electrification of the fleet is already happening and will accelerate as the public embraces these new vehicles and technology gains make them affordable.

As with vehicle safety, we are keeping the consumer educated about their choices in the marketplace. We just completely overhauled the old Fuel Economy Label found on new vehicles. Consumers can now comparison-shop for electric vehicles and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles as well as gasoline and compressed natural gas and hydrogen powered vehicles.

On the electric vehicle safety side, we know that safety issues associated with lithium-ion chemistries are different from those associated with other fuels and technologies. And we will have to conduct research to

better understand these risks, and craft appropriate regulation that doesn't limit technology, but ensures safety for the public.

And, of course, reliance on technology brings new challenges itself. Most, if not all, of these technologies rely on complex electronic control systems. These systems must be well executed and completely reliable, and include robust fail-safes. As complexity increases, this is no easy task. And as vehicles become more and more connected, electronic control systems have to be robust and resilient to cyber attacks and other malicious risks.

As researchers, as engineers, as regulators, we will continue to base our advances on hard scientific data. We will always look at ways to improve our data systems, and we will be creative to ensure we have the right data to address the crash avoidance technologies and other challenges that are coming at us.

Because regardless of whether the future American driver climbs into a plug-in hybrid or a hydrogen fuel cell vehicle, or whether the vehicle takes over some of the driving tasks, that driver will expect to be safe. That driver will expect that vehicle to be efficient and to not contribute harmful emissions into the air. As the highway traffic safety agency, NHTSA remains proactive and engaged with the consumer and the auto industry to help meet those expectations and continue to protect the American public.