

**Oral Testimony Prepared for  
David Strickland, Administrator  
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration  
House EC Committee**

**Washington, DC**

**March 22, 2012**

**Madam Chairman and Members of the Committee, I thank you for this opportunity to testify on vehicle safety issues related to the surface transportation reauthorization. I look forward to working closely with the Committee and the Congress to shape this important reauthorization.**

**As you know, last year the nation continued a long-term downward trend in traffic-related fatalities. In 2010, there were 32,885 motor vehicle related fatalities, a 24**

**percent reduction compared to 2005, and the lowest level since 1949. For all us at NHSTA, this trend is encouraging, but 32,885 fatalities is an unacceptable toll.**

**NHTSA is working across multiple fronts to save lives and reduce traffic-related injuries. We continue to promote responsible driver behavior to reduce alcohol-impaired driving and to encourage the use of seat belts. We are also working vigorously to meet the new challenge of distracted driving. At the same time, we are exploring emerging technologies that have the potential to prevent crashes from happening in the first place.**

- As I discuss more fully in my written testimony, the Senate has included a number of provisions that**

**would permit NHTSA to ensure motor vehicle and equipment safety on a broader basis than we can today, including:**

- **the authority to address safety hazards caused by some imported motor equipment**
- **Greater consumer protection against safety defects or non-compliance from manufacturers who file for bankruptcy, and**
- **increases in the total amount of civil penalties that NHSTA can seek for safety-related violations.**

**To further strengthen our safety mission, we seek additional authority in several areas, including:**

- **Authority to require action by used car dealers or rental companies with regard to recalled vehicles**

- **Clarification of authority over safety-related aspects of distracting portable electronic devices in vehicles, and**
- **Direct appellate review of recall orders to ensure that manufacturers may challenge orders while avoiding lengthy district court trials during which time no recall is in effect to protect consumers**

**We believe that these straightforward clarifications of authority would enable us to address timely safety concerns on our roadways. For example, the authority to notify consumers of recall issues before they purchase a used vehicle or rent a car could easily protect consumers and provide real safety benefits.**

**Here is second example: The agency recently proposed visual-manual driver distraction guidelines. These**

**guidelines are designed for vehicle manufacturers to consider as they introduce electronic devices into vehicles. However, the agency needs clarification of its authority concerning the safety aspects of external devices that can also distract drivers inside the vehicle. Here again, clarification of the agency's authority to do so is an important element in furthering the safety of those devices.**

**Finally, the Senate bill includes numerous rulemaking provisions, some with very short deadlines. I appreciate the inclusion of a provision that would allow an extension of a timeframe, when necessary, with an explanation to the committees of jurisdiction. This will permit the agency to continue to prioritize its regulatory work based on its available resources and its judgment of the likely safety benefits and costs.**

**Thank you again for this opportunity to offer comments. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.**