

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

**DeKalb County Chamber of Commerce  
Atlanta, Georgia  
October 14, 2010**

**Good morning.**

**It's a pleasure to be here. This is home for me, so I am  
thrilled at the chance to come talk to you about what's  
going on in Washington these days.**

**Washington is an interesting town. I've spent most of my professional life there, so I'm fairly comfortable with the ins and outs of our nation's political capital. Before my appointment as NHTSA Administrator, I spent some time on staff in the Senate.**

**Those of in Washington sometime view policy from the 10,000 foot level, which is why your invitation today was a good check for me. I took it as an opportunity to look at the work we are doing at the Department and at the Agency, and ask: "How will our actions affect the citizens and businesses of of DeKalb County?"**

**It's a great question. You are the engine driving DeKalb County forward. Your job is tough enough without Washington making it tougher.**

**Having spent as much time in Washington as I have, I am encouraged to tell you that there is a new energy in the city – a new energy that stems directly from a new way of thinking. As I look ahead at the work in front of NHTSA, I want to assure you that new solutions are coming. We must find a way to protect our way of life, to preserve individual mobility, and yet improve safety and ensure our children will enjoy these benefits as well.**

**This is not just policy talk. In Washington, we've had a spate of pedestrian deaths and injuries in just the past few weeks and days – a mother pushing her child across the street in a stroller, for example, or a young woman getting out of her car is another. It is an outrage. Two Department of Transportation employees have been struck outside our building in the past 6 months alone.**

**These scenarios repeat themselves over and over again across our communities all over the country – close to**

**4,400 pedestrians died in motor vehicle-related crashes in 2008 alone.**

**How do we change this? How do we tackle the many problems across the spectrum of transportation-related issues effectively? The best answer I've seen yet is contained in the President's U.S. transportation policy that improves public health and safety, fosters livable communities, promotes infrastructure repair and long-term economic competitiveness, while achieving environmental sustainability. It is the framework that allows the individual safety issues to be tackled in the context of a broader set of goals.**

**What do I mean by that? Let me continue the pedestrian example. Our transportation policy includes, as a fundamental component, liveable communities - safer passage for pedestrians – safer passage for your customers, your employees, your friends, your families.**

**We are working with a number of federal agencies, including our sister DOT Agency, the Federal Highway Administration. Federal Highways can provide training in pedestrian safety intersection and roadway design, developing pedestrian safety action**

**plans, and with pedestrian safety audits. NHTSA works with the community on the behavioral issues involving pedestrians.**

**NHTSA also focuses on vehicle issues that affect livability as well as safety. As business owners, as consumers, we want our vehicles to be as fuel efficient as possible. Our new fuel economy standards delivered on President Obama's call for a strong and coordinated national policy for fuel economy and greenhouse gas emissions. Working with the Environmental Protection Agency, we set those standards this year and we did so in a way that does not compromise safety.**

**So we are headed in the right direction. But, 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. Or any pedestrian plugged into a cell phone or iPod. 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 in certain situations. We are in the phase of the project now intended to look at requiring these quiet cars to emit a base level of sound at low speeds to let pedestrians know that a vehicle is approaching. To be effective, this sound has to be readily identifiable as a vehicle.**

**For the automobile dealers in the room, I have to tell you, not only do automobiles still play an essential role in our lives and our livelihoods – I believe they probably will for the foreseeable future. Here in the**

**United States, our love affair with the automobile rages on. I know because, I am one of the motor heads.**

**But I'm also a child of the Information Age, and a bit of a techno-geek – all of which fits right in with the President's commitment to transparency and accountability in government. Equipping the public with information is part and parcel of helping to protect them.**

**For example: We just rolled out our enhanced 5-star safety ratings system with the 2011 model year**

**vehicles. For the new ratings, we made changes to the existing front and side crash ratings programs.**

**We added a family of crash test dummies and a side impact pole test to increase occupant safety. We established an overall safety score that will combine the star ratings from the front, side, and rollover programs. Finally, the Agency also implemented a program that we hope will encourage the demand for and use of advanced crash avoidance technologies.**

**The roll out included a communications program to tell the American public what it all means. We want**

**them to understand why some of the new ratings are lower but more rigorous, and that those lower star ratings do not mean the vehicles are less safe than they were a year ago.**

**The response to date has been phenomenal from both the consumers and the manufacturers. In fact, Hyundai even made changes to their 2011 Sonata in mid-production to earn a higher rating – and they did.**

**NHTSA will continue to engage the consumer with information on the behavioral side, too. Drivers and other road users must take an active role in safety—**

**their own and that of those sharing the road. People need to buckle up and keep focused on the task of driving.**

**There are heartbreaking stories every day of crashes that didn't have to happen. For example, the 15-passenger van crash last week outside of Blakely, Georgia. We have to ramp up our efforts and I am asking you to help us.**

**If your company uses 15 passenger vans, make sure your drivers know what the vulnerabilities are of these vehicles.**

**NHTSA has a lot of current and valuable information on 15-passenger van safety on [safercar.gov](http://safercar.gov). Please visit our website for materials and make sure your drivers know what they should be doing to drive these vehicles safely.**

**Lastly, I would like to touch on the subject of Distracted Driving. Distracted Driving is dangerous – almost 5,500 lives lost in 2009 alone due to all types of distractions – and we are determined to put an end to it. In fact, the Secretary of Transportation has been on a crusade against Distracted Driving since last year.**

**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.**

**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.**

**Decades of experience with seat belts and drunk driving has taught us it takes a consistent combination of leadership at all levels of government, a comprehensive strategy, public education, focused and effective enforcement and adjudication, and grassroots advocacy, to improve and sustain safety performance.**

**The good news is, this experience shows that drivers can and do change their behavior over time. So to that end, we have developed a plan to eliminate distraction-related crashes. We have come up with an integrated**

**approach which includes a strong messaging element.**

**Communication is key.**

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

**Distraction is most likely to be a factor in crashes involving younger drivers, especially those less than 20 years old. But drivers of all ages are at risk.**

**Of course, no matter what government does, we can't break America's addiction to distracted driving by ourselves. We need you. We need the business**

**community's leadership. Among the important success stories of the last year are the thousands of U.S. companies that have imposed distracted driving policies of their own.**

**One partner in this effort is the Network of Employers for Traffic Safety, or NETS, an alliance of major corporations, including many on the *Fortune 500* list. NHTSA helped establish NETS more than 20 years ago – and they're driven by the idea, as their chairman Bill Windsor puts it, that “corporate cell phone policies are essential pieces of employee safety equipment.”**

**In advance of our most recent summit just a few weeks ago, DOT joined with NETS to survey American businesses about their distracted driving policies. We discovered that 1,600 companies and organizations, covering approximately 10.5 million workers across the country, have already adopted policies to limit distracted driving.**

**And we helped persuade 550 additional companies and organizations, covering 1.5 million more employees, to adopt similar measures during the next year. This is not a bad step towards our goal: Every**

**employer in America discouraging workers from driving while talking or texting.**

**From our other private sector partners— whether in the wireless, insurance, or automotive industries – we’ve seen a number of constructive measures. The Wireless Association and individual insurance companies have been vocal in reminding the public not to message behind the wheel. That’s a start. We’re grateful. Auto companies have supported laws that ban drivers from texting or talking on a handheld device while driving. The public is safer for it.**

**Protecting the American Public is the cornerstone of NHTSA's mission. To fulfill that mission, I expect us to be active and pro-active. And I believe we are putting the right framework in place to strengthen our Nation and protect our future. Thank you.**