

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

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Thank you, Peter. It is a pleasure and an honor for me to be sitting on this panel with my DOT colleagues and to fully support RITA's leadership in the area of intelligent transportation systems. We all share in this opportunity to keep our nation's transportation system the best in the world. And the safest.

NHTSA's track record is tremendous, but, I know there is still much work to be done. Secretary LaHood has vowed to keep safety as the top priority for the department, and he has vowed to do so in a spirit of openness and collaboration. I am making that same commitment for NHTSA.

We've had some good news on the highway safety front. Earlier this year, the Secretary released numbers that show a continuing dramatic reduction in the overall number of highway deaths.

Our analysis projects that traffic fatalities have declined for the 15th consecutive quarter, and will be 33,963 in 2009, the lowest annual level since 1954. In terms of lives lost per 100 million vehicle miles traveled, the number of deaths dropped to 1.16, again the lowest level on record.

Are we winning the battle? Not yet. The loss of more than 33,000 people in traffic-related crashes in a single year represents a serious public health problem to our Nation. We will not rest until that number is zero. My goal for this Agency is to make sure that we keep making gains in lives saved by using all the tools at our disposal.

For example, we will continue to support our law enforcement partners with national campaigns and other resources in the fight against drunk driving. We will continue to encourage States to expand and improve their ignition interlock programs as part of a comprehensive approach to combat drunk driving.

Drunk driving is one of our nation's deadliest crimes, and we are committed to eliminating it from our roadways. In 2007 alone, nearly 13,000 people were killed in highway crashes involving a driver or motorcycle rider with an illegal blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .08 or higher.

We will continue to work closely with law enforcement and State and local safety advocates promoting seat belt use. The simple seat belt has saved more lives than any other technological invention ever implemented in vehicles. We estimate that seat belts saved an estimated 13,250 lives in 2008.

The ITS program has played a major role in the development of vehicle safety technologies. We believe that many of the new technologies offer great hope for safety in the future. Vehicle-based technologies such as Forward Collision Warning Systems and, Lane Departure Warning Systems will provide drivers a little extra help when they need it most.

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 including Ford, General Motors, Honda, Hyundai-Kia, Mercedes-Benz, Nissan, Toyota, and Volkswagen 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 Intelligent Transportation Systems 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 impact of safety applications enabled by V2V. NHTSA believes 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 owners.

But technology can work against us, as well. Drivers and other road users must take an active role in safety—their own and that of those sharing the road.

Vehicle occupants need to buckle up and keep focused on the task of driving. Technologies may be able to detect the presence of vulnerable road users, but both they and the vehicle drivers need to be on the lookout for each other.

My intent is for NHTSA to develop an evaluative framework for in-car technologies. We are in the second decade of the 21st century and I guarantee there will be new whiz-bang gadgetry for in-vehicle use every week.

Rather than react to every technology as it pops up and becomes a distraction, NHTSA needs a framework that clearly defines the danger zone for the driver — allowing NHTSA to keep pace with the industry, rather than playing catch-up.

We will not take a back seat while new telematics and *infotainment* systems are introduced. These have too great a potential to create more and more distraction for the driver. We will develop guidelines for these systems.

NHTSA will challenge the auto industry and the cell phone industry to work collaboratively with us to keep the driver focused on their required task: driving.

Motorcoach Safety is another high-profile issue for NHTSA. Travel by motorcoach is an extremely safe form of travel. But NHTSA is investigating methods to reduce the number of fatalities in motorcoach crashes.

We know that ejections account for 64 percent of motorcoach passenger deaths, and, we are working on several priority safety areas to mitigate these losses.

We expect to publish a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking for seat belts on motorcoaches this year.

NHTSA, working with the Environmental Protection Agency, has delivered on President Obama's call for a strong and coordinated national policy for fuel economy and greenhouse gas emission standards for motor vehicles, and we did so in a way that does not compromise safety. We published the final rule on CAFE on April 1.

NHTSA's work touches on many fronts, including law enforcement, education, and technology. I've briefly touched on some of the more high-profile items on the NHTSA agenda.

I could talk about many more, including teen driver safety, motorcycles, pedestrian safety and quiet cars, and, child passenger safety. I can assure you, every part of our work is a priority and we will continue to focus on making our nation's roadways safer for the American public.

Thank you.