

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

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“Bridge to the Future”

Good morning. Thank you, Dan, for your kind words. It is a pleasure to be here. This is my second auto show in three weeks and I love it. I confess. I’m a bit of a motorhead. The science, the ingenuity, the brilliance of the engineering that is being worked on today, I find it inspiring.

Mostly, I'm inspired by the promise in the work being done by the auto industry – the promise for the future. Because we're facing some fairly complex issues in that future. In fact, some of the biggest issues America now faces, as a nation, involve 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.

I begin my tenure at NHTSA with these issues and opportunities. When the President asked me to take the wheel at NHTSA, he knew I'd already worked closely with all major aspects of the industry. Knowing the breadth and scope of the mission, I rolled up my sleeves even before I arrived at NHTSA headquarters to do my best to hit the ground running. I'm ready to deliver on this agency's mission, and, I am ready to position this agency so that it can keep pace with the industry it regulates and work to address these difficult challenges.

Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1809:

“The care of human life and happiness . . . is the first and only legitimate object of good government.”

NHTSA's safety mission epitomizes the "care of human life."

President Jefferson's quote captures my belief in the consumer protection mission of this agency – it is central to my belief about NHTSA.

Our mission remains the same: Save lives, prevent injuries and reduce economic costs due to road traffic crashes. Our reliance on sound science and data as the foundation for our solutions to highway safety won't change. We will be accountable to the President, to the Secretary of Transportation, and to the American Public, whom we serve.

I can tell you what should change is your expectation of NHTSA. The story of America in the 20th century is closely intertwined with the automobile. We love our automobiles. And there is no doubt that the automobile was one of the greatest technical triumphs of the 20th century. It gave us unprecedented freedom to roam, to build, to explore. It helped us push economic and social boundaries.

Automobiles still play an essential role in our lives and our livelihoods. What's more, we express our personalities through our vehicle choices — we love driving around in our cars. More so now than ever, when technology lets us play our iPods on our car stereo, can turn our vehicles into mobile offices, or, in some cases, it can even park our cars.

Every aspect of vehicles today is driving a change in expectations—not only here at home but in the global marketplace.

Which leads me to ask my very first question as NHTSA Administrator: “Is NHTSA being well-served by the four vehicle statutory authorities it relies on to regulate?” I don’t know, but we are taking a hard look at them. The reality is that while the current authority works and the various constituencies have learned to work with them, they were written in the 1960s and 1970s, when the world and the automobile market were profoundly different. The question I pose, and the answers I want to have, is whether NHTSA’s statutory authorities accommodate the modern automobile? The modern competitive marketplace?

More importantly, do they allow us to regulate in a way that allows the industry to build and sell products that the consumer wants to drive? Do they allow us to promote safety, innovation, and fuel efficiency? And do they allow NHTSA to move at pace with the industry? I suspect that maybe not as well as they could—so I've asked our legal staff to take a look at them and make their best recommendations.

And I'm inviting you to come talk to us. Revisiting our authority is a tremendous opportunity for us. It's an opportunity to serve the public, the auto industry, and the safety community better.

Tell us what you think would help make the process clearer or more logical. The door is open at NHTSA. Please take me up on this invitation.

I want to recommend myself to you as someone who wants to further fine-tune our relationship with constant dialog about these issues. NHTSA cannot regulate in a vacuum. And I do not work that way. The better the dialog, the clearer the communications, the more effective I am.

I'm already meeting with the individual auto companies and will continue to do so. I'm planning on meeting with the tire industry folks, and the safety advocates. The Secretary of Transportation made safety a priority for the department during his confirmation hearing last year, and he has delivered on that promise. As the highway traffic safety agency, we are on point and we will take that duty seriously.

Take for example, the issue of distracted driving. 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.

In my role as Senior Counsel for the Senate Commerce Committee, I found open dialog to be a direct conduit to some pretty good outcomes. The ongoing work on reauthorization of the NHTSA in the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act of 2005 (SAFETEA-LU) is a good model. By working with the Executive Branch, the Congress, and the State-level constituencies, I believe we have evolved the highway safety grants program. I think we are close to striking the right balance for all sides involved. I think this process works, and I think in the end, we will all be better served.

It's no secret that we are evolving into a global community. Not only are we all connected, it seems, but I see some common concerns and ideals spreading. Of course that extends to how we power our cars and trucks. We want our vehicles to be as fuel efficient as possible. As countries around the world move to

address global climate change and reduce energy consumption, we will continue to push for the development of aggressive but achievable fuel economy and greenhouse gas emission standards for motor vehicles.

NHTSA, working with the Environmental Protection Agency, will deliver 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 will do so in a way that does not compromise safety. We expect to publish the final rule on CAFE in April.

Let me share with you something our President said when he gathered lawmakers and the auto industry to challenge us to address this issue. He said, "No longer will we accept anything

less than a common effort, made in good faith, to solve our toughest problems.”

President Obama has great faith in collaboration and I share that belief. Let me share this with you, too. My expectation for NHTSA is that we will be an active agency.

As an agency, we devote a lot of time and effort to technology.

And it's not just about the latest fancy media center interface. To us, technology is a tool that a): will not only make us greener, but, b): it should also make us safer.

I am extremely encouraged by active safety technology and it will play an increasingly significant role in the Agency's injury prevention and reduction strategies. In the future, we will have capabilities in the area of communication, satellite mapping, detection and sensing technologies, image processing, system controls and computing power that will give manufacturers far greater capability in designing vehicles to detect unsafe conditions and react faster than a driver can do on their own.

We're 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 Daimler, Chrysler, Ford, General Motors, Honda, and Toyota that will develop and evaluate the effectiveness of safety systems that use vehicle-to-vehicle communications. We're in the second year of a 3-year effort that is part of the Department's Intelligent Transportation Systems Program.

This project will compare the performance of rear-end, road departure and lane change crash avoidance systems, that use V2V communications. 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.

The project will develop minimum system performance requirements, and determine the safety impact for these systems. Additionally, the project will propose strategies to implement the technology on a widespread basis.

Technology is headed for an intersection on the behavioral side of traffic safety as well, and it will pose some huge questions for us as a society. I believe this intersection of behavior modification and technology enhancement provides tremendous potential for continued and accelerated improvement in highway safety performance.

But, when we get there, we will have to address the question of common safety versus individual privacy. For example, there are devices that could assist law enforcement in the identification of serious offenders through the use of license plate reading technology.

The State of California is leading the way in exploring this technology. The use of technology, such as license plate readers, helps law enforcement in a number of ways, including the identification of drivers with license revocation and/or suspension and errors with vehicle registrations. The devices can scan hundreds of license plates per hour, greatly increasing the efficiency of identifying improperly or unlicensed drivers.

At NHTSA, we are very hopeful that technology will make a big difference in the fight against impaired driving as well. In early 2008, NHTSA and the Automotive Coalition for Traffic Safety entered into a cooperative research agreement to explore the feasibility, the potential benefits of, and the public policy challenges associated with a more widespread use of in-vehicle technology to prevent alcohol-impaired driving.

NHTSA has an agreement with the auto industry to develop technologies that can accurately and reliably detect alcohol impairment and prevent impaired drivers from starting or operating their vehicle.

This will be a long-term effort – but we are hopeful it will produce a technology that is completely invisible to the driver and could be widely installed on a voluntary market-driven basis. Our task then, becomes selling this idea to the public.

And we have a good track record of reaching out to consumers. We do it for safety ratings for vehicles, Child Passenger Safety, Teen drivers, etc.

Our New Car Assessment Program plays a key role now in informing and helping to guide the purchasing decisions of consumers. It also induces manufacturers to look for marketing opportunities based on safety. Around the world today, other Nations are using new car safety rating programs as a way of influencing consumer buying decisions.

I will leverage NHTSA's resources and knowledge in this crucial area to initiate and broaden the safety dialog with the consumer to include new topics and concerns.

There's an old proverb that says, "He that would be a leader must be a bridge." NHTSA will be that bridge for the future.

My door is open. I want to hear from all constituencies in the highway traffic safety equation. I want to turn up the tempo, and the volume, of the dialog about the future.

Thank you.