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BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION, TREASURY AND
INDEPENDENT AGENCIES
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
APRIL 3, 2003

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee:

I welcome the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss priority transportation safety issues facing this country. Today, I am pleased to appear with my colleagues from the National Transportation Safety Board and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration--two agencies with whom NHTSA collaborates closely--to discuss priority transportation safety issues. We look forward to working with the Congress to address this problem of great National importance.

In these uncertain times, the American public is looking to the highest levels of government for assurance of its safety. The President has pledged that the safety and security of our citizens is the nation's highest priority. To that end, the Secretary of Transportation has established transportation safety as the Department's number one priority. NHTSA is pledged to demonstrating the same level of commitment toward solving the highway safety issues confronting this nation.

NHTSA's FY 2004 budget request of \$665 million will help us build on past successes to deliver effective solutions to highway safety problems. The paramount highway safety goal within the Department is to reduce the fatality rate to no more than 1.0 fatality for every 100 million vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by 2008. This is not just a NHTSA goal; it is a goal of the entire Department of Transportation. Our FY 2004 budget request reflects NHTSA's commitment to attaining the departmental goal, with the help of our DOT colleagues, the States, and the many non-Governmental organizations who are partners in this effort.

Motor vehicle crashes are responsible for 95 percent of all transportation-related deaths and 99 percent of all transportation-related injuries. They are the leading cause of death for Americans ages 4-33. The total number of highway fatalities has been increasing slightly since 1998 while the rate per vehicle miles traveled has decreased. In 2001, 42,116 people were killed on America's roads and highways, for a fatality rate of 1.51 per 100 million VMT. The Department has established a performance goal of no more than 1.38 fatalities per 100 million VMT by the end of FY 2004.

Traffic injuries in police-reported crashes decreased by five percent in 2001. This is excellent news. But we still are faced with the overwhelming fact that over 3 million

people were injured in traffic crashes in 2001. Traffic crashes are not only a grave public health problem for our nation, but also a significant economic problem. Traffic crashes cost our economy \$230.6 billion in 2000, or 2.3 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product. This translates to an average of \$820 for every person living in the United States. Included in this figure is \$81 billion in lost productivity, \$32.6 billion in medical expenses, and \$59 billion in property damage. The average cost for a critically injured survivor is estimated at \$1.1 million over a lifetime. This figure does not even begin to reflect the physical and psychological suffering of the victims and their families.

If safety is our number one priority, our nation must pay close attention to the deaths of 42,000 Americans, the cost of these deaths, and the solutions. Given the likely increase in miles traveled, a failure to improve the fatality rate will result in 50,000 Americans killed annually by 2008.

The FY 2004 budget request of \$665 million is a performance-based budget with clear goals and measures. In addition, the budget is established around two major performance-based programs: *Vehicle Safety* and *Traffic Injury Control*. Program budgets are grouped under their corresponding goals for more efficient use of resources and more accurate performance measurement in meeting each goal. The budget includes measurable performance targets and outputs that clearly demonstrate not only *how*, but *how well*, the budgetary resources are expended.

Program Highlights

Deaths and injuries can be prevented by building on the proven success of existing programs and, when indicated, developing new programs and evaluating their effectiveness. Within the two broad program areas, our programmatic emphasis for FY 2004 focuses on five priority areas: *safety belt and child restraint use, impaired driving, vehicle rollover, vehicle compatibility and traffic records/data collection*. We have set up Integrated Project Teams for the priority areas that have developed recommendations for the agency to pursue to address these important areas. My statement will address each of these.

Safety Belt Use

Safety belt use cuts the risk of death in a crash in half. The good news is that in 2002, safety belt use in the United States reached 75 percent--an all-time high. All 50 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico had child passenger safety laws, and 49 States had adult safety belt laws in effect. As of October 2002, eighteen States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico had primary safety belt laws in effect, meaning that a motorist can be cited for failure to wear a safety belt. The remaining States, except New Hampshire, had laws preventing police from issuing a citation unless another traffic law was broken. These are referred to as secondary laws. New Hampshire continues to have no adult safety belt law. Safety belt use among African-Americans increased to a level above that of the general population (77 percent), an eight percentage-point increase since 2000. Belt use among those in rural areas increased to 73 percent in 2002, a five

percentage-point gain. The bad news is that, in 2002, the 25 percent of vehicle occupants who failed to use safety belts cost themselves and America 6,800 preventable deaths and 170,000 preventable injuries, resulting in \$18 billion in medical costs, lost productivity, and other injury related expenses.

Our safety belt use target for 2003 is 78 percent and our 2004 target is 79 percent nationwide. These targets are optimistic but achievable. Based on the National Occupant Protection Use Survey (NOPUS) data for 1994 – 2001, the agency estimates that each year approximately 8.5 percent of non-safety belt users have converted to being regular belt users. Continuing to convert this percentage each year becomes increasingly more difficult because, as the conversion occurs, the hard-core non-users become a higher proportion of the remaining non-users. If we are able to meet the 2004 target, 1,000 more lives would be saved and 28,000 more injuries prevented.

Most passenger vehicle occupants killed in motor vehicle crashes continue to be totally unrestrained. If we were to achieve a national 90 percent belt use, 4,000 lives would be saved each year. This usage rate is not only possible, it can be exceeded. For example, Hawaii currently has a 90.4 percent use rate, Puerto Rico a 90.5 percent use rate, California a 91.1 percent use rate, and Washington State a 92.6 percent use rate.

States achieve high levels of belt use through primary safety belt laws, strict enforcement of existing laws, public education using paid and earned media, and high profile law enforcement programs, such as the *Click it or Ticket* campaign. Highway safety research has demonstrated that an intensive, high visibility traffic enforcement program significantly increases safety belt use. NHTSA has supported high visibility enforcement for the last decade, following a model that was developed in several States in the early 1990s. With funding authorized under TEA-21 and with support from this committee, these campaigns have grown tremendously, saving thousands of lives. Following a highly effective *Click It or Ticket* program in 8 southeastern States in 2001, the agency undertook a similar campaign involving media saturation and highly visible enforcement in 30 States in May 2002. In ten States that completely adopted the model and were extensively evaluated, safety belt use increased an average of nine percent, with one State—Vermont—experiencing a 19 percentage-point increase, followed by West Virginia with a 15 percentage-point increase.

The FY 2003 occupant protection program encourages nationwide adoption of the *Click It or Ticket* campaign. In FY 2003, 43 States, DC and PR qualified for grant funds to support *Click It or Ticket* campaigns. Also, in FY 2003 Congress provided funding for NHTSA to purchase \$8 million of national advertising that will further enhance the benefit of these State and local enforcement campaigns. In addition, the occupant protection program also includes demonstrations of new strategies for increasing belt use among high-risk, low-use groups, such as pick-up truck drivers, minorities, and teens. Support for the high visibility enforcement campaigns, together with resources to support paid and earned media and new strategies for reaching high-risk groups will enable us to achieve our 2003 target and prepare for further gains in coming years.

In FY 2004, NHTSA plans to continue to encourage States to embrace the *Click It or Ticket* campaign and to begin investigating strategies to assist States with integrating high visibility enforcement into their ongoing enforcement routine. NHTSA is also proposing a new primary safety belt law incentive grant program that is expected to result in additional States upgrading their laws. In 2002, States with primary safety belt laws averaged 80 percent use, 11 percentage points higher than those with secondary laws. In addition, the agency will utilize the results of our high-risk group demonstration programs to develop programs and materials that will increase use among these populations.

We will continue these high profile programs in FY 2004 because they succeed in reminding the motoring public that using safety belts and child safety seats save lives, and create an added incentive to wear belts for those who currently break the law. We are serious about reducing the \$18 billion toll to America from the failure to wear safety belts.

Child Restraint Use

In addition to our success in raising safety belt use, we have made steady progress in getting children restrained. Restraint use by young children rose to unprecedented levels in 2002. Fatalities among children, ages 15 and under, reached a historic low, particularly fatalities for children between the ages of 0-4. In 2002, a NHTSA survey revealed the rate for child restraint use was 99 percent for infants (under 12 months), 94 percent for toddlers (1-3 years), and 83 percent for children ages 4-7.

To comply with the TREAD Act's goal of reducing deaths and injuries by 25 percent among 4 to 8 year-olds, NHTSA published a five-year strategic plan in a report to Congress in June 2002, focusing on improving consumer awareness, booster seat safety benefits, and the enforcement of booster seat laws. In support of a November 5, 2002, final rule establishing a consumer information program to rate child restraints on ease of use, the FY 2004 New Car Assessment Program (NCAP) budget will support child safety seat Ease-of-Use ratings for over 90 percent of the child safety seats on the market. These ratings will be published annually in a brochure and on the Web, starting with spring 2003.

Impaired Driving

In 2001, 17,448 people died in alcohol-related crashes (41 percent of the total fatalities for the year), a 27 percent reduction from the 23,833 alcohol-related fatalities in 1988. Intoxication rates decreased for drivers of all age groups involved in fatal crashes over the past decade, with drivers 25 to 34 years old experiencing the greatest decrease, followed by drivers 16 to 20 years old. However, the easier gains have been made and even with the decline over the past ten years, drivers 21-24 years old experienced the highest intoxication rates in 2001. The total number of alcohol-related fatalities also increased slightly between 2000 and 2001.

NHTSA's target for 2004 is to reduce the rate of alcohol related fatalities to 0.53 per 100 million VMT from the current 0.63.

In 2003, the agency is encouraging States to adopt high-profile law enforcement programs, combined with paid and earned media saturation. These programs will combine a high level of sustained enforcement with intense enforcement mobilizations around the July 4 and December holiday periods. As with the *Click It or Ticket* campaign, these programs will use both paid and earned media to alert the public about the increased risk of arrest. NHTSA is working intensely with 13 States on this type of campaign. The first of these campaigns was in December 2002 through early January 2003. We are currently collecting the data from these States to determine the overall success of this mobilization on the numbers of deaths and injuries. We appreciate the support of Congress in enhancing these law enforcement campaigns.

In FY 2003, we are also continuing to support State activities to upgrade impaired driving laws. Currently, 35 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have enacted laws making it unlawful for a driver to operate a motor vehicle with a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .08 percent, up from .08 this time last year. In addition, all States now have zero tolerance laws prohibiting any level of alcohol in the blood of a driver who is under age 21. We will continue to urge strong State legislation as a framework for an effective impaired driving program. In addition, NHTSA is conducting a range of demonstration programs to develop strategies for upgrading prosecution and adjudication processes, and improving impaired driver records systems.

NHTSA's FY 2004 impaired driving program will continue to focus on highly sustained and periodic law enforcement campaigns, together with implementing improvements to the prosecution, adjudication, and records systems. We will also be developing additional strategies based in part on what we learn from the *You Drink & Drive. You Lose.* campaign results. For FY 2004, the agency has proposed a State grant program that will focus significant resources on a relatively small number of States with particularly severe impaired driving problems. The grant program will include support for States to conduct detailed reviews of their impaired driving systems by a team of outside experts and assist them in developing a five-year strategic plan for improving programs, processes, and reducing impaired driving-related fatalities and injuries. Additional support such as training and legal advice in the prosecution and adjudication of DWI cases, and working with licensing and criminal justice authorities to close legal loopholes will also be provided. Finally, in addition to the enforcement campaign and grant program, in FY 2004 we will also conduct more studies on impaired driving behavior using the National Advanced Driving Simulator. These studies will be used to refine agency countermeasures and regulatory initiatives.

NHTSA believes that continued nationwide use of high-visibility enforcement and media campaigns, together with the targeted State grant program and support activities, will lead to a resumption of the downward trend in alcohol-related fatalities that we experienced over the past decade.

Vehicle Rollover

More than 10,000 people died in the United States in 2001 as a result of vehicle rollover crashes. This type of crash accounts for less than five percent of all passenger vehicle crashes, but one-third of passenger vehicle occupant deaths. We know that light trucks (particularly pickup trucks and sport utility vehicles) have a rollover rate significantly higher than passenger cars, and we know this is because light trucks have higher centers of gravity. Since light trucks account for an increasing portion of total light vehicle sales, deaths and injuries in rollover crashes will become a greater safety problem unless something changes.

One step we have taken (beginning in 2001) is to rate vehicles in our New Car Assessment Program for their propensity to rollover. Our NCAP ratings are based on the vehicle's static stability factor, which is calculated based on the height of the vehicle's center of gravity and its track width. These rollover ratings correlate very closely with experience in real-world crashes. The lowest rated, one-star vehicles in our rollover NCAP have a 40 percent chance of rollover per single vehicle crash compared to a 10 percent chance for vehicles with the highest five-star rating. The National Academy of Sciences independently evaluated our rollover NCAP ratings and found that our current ratings are valuable and accurate, but suggested the ratings could be even better if we also evaluated vehicles in a dynamic rollover test that measures how vehicles perform in emergency steering conditions. We have proposed to adopt this change, consistent with Congress's direction in the TREAD Act, and our FY 2004 budget includes \$1.7 million to implement this change in the 2004 model year. We believe this combined rollover rating will correlate even more closely to real-world rollover experience, and give the American public a more useful piece of information for choosing a new vehicle.

Our experience in rating vehicles for rollover shows that vehicles differ significantly. For instance, sport utility vehicles range from one star to four stars for rollover resistance. Pickup trucks range from one star to three stars. We want to make sure that people who are choosing sport utility vehicles and pickup trucks have the information that will allow them to choose the ones less prone to roll over.

While we would like to prevent rollovers from happening, we recognize that some rollover crashes will occur. Thus, we must also consider other actions that will help reduce deaths and injuries in rollover crashes. We expect to announce a proposed upgrade of our door lock requirements later this year. We also expect to propose an upgrade to our roof crush standard in FY 2004. Finally, we are considering a proposal to reduce ejections through windows.

However, there is another step that we need to emphasize for improved safety in rollovers – one that can be taken today with no changes whatever to vehicles. We can significantly reduce the deaths and injuries in rollover crashes if we can get more Americans to use the safety belts that are in their vehicles today. Most people killed in rollovers are ejected totally or partially from the vehicle. Safety belts can prevent nearly all of these ejections.

Safety belts are 80 percent effective in preventing deaths in rollovers involving light trucks and 74 percent effective in rollovers involving passenger cars.

Vehicle Compatibility

The vehicle fleet has changed dramatically in the last 20 years, and these changes have given rise to an unprecedented vehicle mismatch in vehicle-to-vehicle crashes. Of course, vehicle compatibility has been a concern for longer than the past 20 years, but the earlier concerns about compatibility among different vehicles on the road were primarily related to differences between large and small cars, and the primary difference was simply the mass of the vehicles. However, more recently, the rising popularity of light trucks, vans, and SUVs has made the problem substantially more complex. Now, in addition to differences in vehicle mass, we must address inherent design differences, including disparities in vehicle height, geometry, and vehicle stiffness. The fleet average weight of light passenger vehicles that was approximately 3,000 pounds in 1990 is almost 4,000 pounds today. Similar changes are occurring in front-end heights and stiffness. The average initial stiffness of light trucks is about twice that of passenger cars. This increases the risk of death and injury to occupants in certain passenger vehicles when they interact with the more aggressive ones.

While light trucks and vans (LTVs) account for 36 percent of all registered vehicles, they are involved in approximately half of all fatal two-vehicle crashes involving passenger cars. In these collisions, over 80 percent of the fatalities are passenger car occupants. We need to address this problem now, since LTVs constitute half of all new vehicle sales.

An Integrated Project Team from offices within the agency is already addressing this issue. I expect to publish that team's recommendations for public comment in the very near future. This team has identified some ways in which the safety features of a struck vehicle may be improved to better protect the occupants in a crash with a more aggressive vehicle and measures to reduce the aggressiveness of striking vehicles.

The greatest problem in vehicle compatibility occurs when an LTV strikes a passenger car in the side. In the near term, we expect to propose a significant upgrade to our side impact protection standard. While improving upon the protection already provided to the chest and pelvis in our side impact standard, this upgrade will also add a measure of head protection to our side impact standard, because our data show that head injury is a serious risk in side crashes. We will also explore the idea of adding different sized dummies to our side impact standard.

I am also happy to tell you that NHTSA is not the only party that is trying to address compatibility. Vehicle manufacturers have acknowledged that they also have a responsibility to address this issue. Manufacturers have formed their own working groups to develop recommendations for some voluntary actions that can be taken to address vehicle compatibility. These manufacturers have committed to developing initial recommendations by late spring. In addition, the government of Japan has committed to share test data and other information with NHTSA on the issue of vehicle compatibility.

With this cooperation, the American people will get a much quicker response to the problem of vehicle compatibility than if NHTSA were to address this issue by itself.

Traffic Records/Data Collection

Crash Causation Data

NHTSA's FY 2004 budget request will enable us to update our crash causation data, last generated comprehensively in the 1970s. Vehicle design, traffic patterns, numbers and types of vehicles in use, on-board technologies and lifestyles have changed dramatically in the last 30 years. Old assumptions about the causes of crashes may no longer be valid. Since the agency depends on causation data to form the basis for its priorities, we must ensure that this data is current and accurate. We have requested \$10 million to perform a comprehensive update of our crash causation data that will allow us to target our efforts for the next decade on the factors that are the most frequent causes of crashes on American roads.

NHTSA has in place an infrastructure of investigation teams that will enable us to perform the study efficiently and accurately. These teams are currently performing a similar study for large, commercial truck crashes and are adept at gathering evidence from the scene, the hospital, and from victim and witness interviews. Their findings will guide the agency's programs in crash avoidance, including vehicle technologies as well as human factors.

State Traffic Records

States are under increasing budgetary constraints that severely impact their ability to maintain or improve their Traffic Records System (TRS) data. Due to personnel reductions, law enforcement agencies in many States now maintain data only on fatal and severe injury crashes as opposed to crashes of all severities. Deficiencies in States' TRS data negatively impact national databases including the Fatality Analysis Reporting System, General Estimates System, National Driver Register, Highway Safety Information System, and Commercial Driver License Information System as well as State data used to identify local safety problems. In FY 2004, NHTSA is requesting an additional \$50,000,000 for a new Traffic Records/Data Improvement Program in the States. The new initiative will provide incentive grants to States to support improved TRS data. In addition to police reports, emergency medical services, driver licensing, vehicle registration, and citation/court data provide essential information not available elsewhere. All would be improved by this program. Accurate State TRS data are critical to identifying local safety issues, applying focused safety countermeasures, and evaluating the effectiveness of countermeasures.

Highway Safety Grant Program Restructuring

As a final point, I want to describe briefly the restructuring that we are proposing for highway safety grants. The FY 2004 budget consolidates all highway traffic safety grant resources provided by TEA-21 (\$447,000,000) within NHTSA. This includes \$222,000,000 of resources for the Sections 157 and 163 grant programs formerly appropriated in the Federal Highway Administration's budget. NHTSA has administered these funds since their creation, so the FY 2004 budget proposes that those funds be appropriated directly to NHTSA. The grants process under TEA-21 was very complex and time consuming for the States, and resulted in unnecessary overhead that could otherwise be applied to safety programs. It contained eight programs with various qualification and administrative requirements. NHTSA is working to simplify the system by reducing the number of programs and streamlining the process to qualify for and administer grant funds. NHTSA is also studying ways to tie additional Section 402 funds to a State's highway safety performance, based on performance measures that are aligned with the national highway safety goals. We will submit our proposals for streamlining and performance-based measures to Congress in the Administration's proposal to reauthorize the surface transportation programs.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. In closing, I would like to thank the committee for its continued steadfast support of our highway safety program. I look forward to working with you in developing a strong and productive performance-based, results-oriented, FY 2004 highway safety program that will provide National leadership through effective and efficient programs. I would be pleased to answer any questions.