

**Remarks of Jeffrey W. Runge, M.D.
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American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials

Panel: "Painting the Safety Picture"

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- President Bush has continued to stress that safety and security are his number one transportation priorities.
- The President and this Administration are committed to fostering the safest, most secure national transportation system possible, even as we seek to enhance mobility, reduce congestion, and expand our economy.
- These are completely compatible goals. Indeed, it is essential that the Nation's transportation system be both safe and secure while we are making our economy more efficient and productive.
- Our role at the Department of Transportation is to be safety advocates. We will not waiver from this role. This goes beyond my agency, and the Secretary has made sure that all of us understand this. Safety is something we have embraced across the board in all parts of the Department.
- All of us here, every one of us that you see here on this stage, share a commitment with you to enhance the safety and security of the American public, particularly when they are traveling on our nation's highways.
- The Secretary recently placed renewed emphasis on safety, charging our entire Department with working toward a common goal: a reduction in motor vehicle highway fatalities. He said:

“For the past year and a half we have dedicated ourselves to improving transportation security for Americans. Faced with the scourge of terrorism our Department responded by creating unprecedented partnerships with the private sector, with Congress, and other groups and federal agencies.

Together we succeeded in decreasing the dangers of terrorism through new and better technology, necessary personnel, improved laws, and increased education.

Well, we are going to do the same thing with car crashes. More than 42,000 Americans dying each year and millions more injured are statistics we will not let stand. This year we are going to take the same passion, call on the same

partnerships, and build the same record of success through enforcement, education, and engineering. Why? Because we can – and we will.

(So), I am giving another mandate to my Department: dramatically reduce the number of Americans killed or injured in car crashes.”

- And you can believe it. The Secretary backs up what he says. This is not just lip service. President Bush and Secretary Mineta have made reducing highway fatalities a priority for the Department and for the reauthorization of TEA-21.
- Let me be clear about this: This is not just about cars, it’s not just about trucks, or pavement, or guardrails, or rumble strips, or anything else. This is a conjoined effort and we are all in this together.
- I am starting our coordinated presentation by painting the current safety picture and how the Administration’s reauthorization proposal, known as SAFETEA, will address this.
- This past year has included some encouraging and some discouraging news regarding highway safety in America. I’d like to review some of the highlights.
- Although we are making progress on some fronts, in 2002 preliminary estimates show that 42,850 people lost their lives in highway crashes. Just under 3 million more were injured.
- These 2002 numbers represent a slight increase in fatalities over 2001 and a modest decrease in injuries.
- One piece of good news from the 2002 numbers concerns the total number of fatalities relative to increasing exposure. The total number of vehicle miles traveled continued to increase last year as they have for many years. Despite this upward trend, the death rate per VMT has held steady.
- Motor vehicle crashes are responsible for 95% of transportation related deaths and 99% of transportation related injuries. Crashes are *the* leading cause of death for Americans, from 2 years of age to 33 years of age.
- They also represent a staggering loss – in terms of human lives lost and the estimated \$230 billion impact on the economy. That’s an average of \$820 for every person living in the U.S.
- That is the total, national cost. Want to know what this is costing the taxpayers of your state? We have prepared a packet for each of you that contains information specifically for your state. Included in this packet is a cost sheet that displays the costs currently incurred for motor vehicle crashes in each state.

- It is an unspeakable tragedy that we lose so many lives each year. This is all the more tragic since, in most cases, these losses are preventable.
- Where is the sense of public outrage? Why is the public not more concerned about this major public health issue?
- The Secretary has set a goal of reducing motor vehicle fatalities to not more than 1.0 per 100 million vehicle miles traveled by 2008.
- We are undertaking this massive job – improving safety for all Americans - with help from our partners. I am buoyed by the fact that AASHTO has recognized safety as a very important plank in your platform both last year and this year, and voted just yesterday to adopt the Department of Transportation safety goals as your own.
- If we do nothing and allow the current rate to remain unchanged, we will have an increase of about 7 – 8,000 deaths per year by 2008. To avoid this result, we have targeted specific areas that are ripe for dramatic safety improvement.
- Our analysts identified those efforts we could undertake that would yield the greatest benefit in lives saved. This is where we are concentrating our current efforts, and this is where SAFETEA will focus resources.
- Why is this plan important? Because there is significant funding in this Act, and if you want your share you will have to develop a plan and follow it.
- The solutions: We know what works. You know what works. Safety belts are a proven, free, readily available remedy to guard the public from preventable injury. Driving sober brings down the numbers.
- SAFETEA addresses these through support for State programs to increase safety belt use and reduce impaired driving.
- We are now at 75% national safety belt use. Our goal is to reach 78% use by the end of year, but the action to reach that goal is primarily with the states.
- There is no denying the value of a primary safety belt law.
- It is well worth the effort. For every 1% increase in belt use nationwide, 2.8 million more people are buckling up, 250 lives are saved, \$800 million in economic cost is saved, and we reduce the severity of 4,400 moderate to critical injuries.
- The most recent news on impaired driving is not good. The past 3 years have seen small increases in impaired driving deaths. In 2002 the number killed increased over the prior year by about 3%.

- We have another goal, to move from .63 to .53 alcohol-related fatalities per one hundred million VMT by the end of 2004.
- Which brings us to the solution: SAFETEA (Safe, Accountable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act). Thanks to hard work by you and others, SAFETEA builds on the tremendous successes of previous transportation statutes – the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) and TEA-21.
- While formulating the Department’s reauthorization proposal, the Federal Highway Administration, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration and NHTSA worked together to develop a different approach to addressing the Nation’s substantial highway safety problems.
- One of the key principles underlying the Administration’s approach is *flexibility*. You will find this theme throughout the reauthorization proposal.
- The other is *accountability*. States will have the benefits of increased funding levels to achieve their safety goals combined with far more flexibility in deciding how to apply those funds, but along with this comes accountability. States will be held accountable, through their plans, to achieve their performance goals.
- SAFETEA’s approach creates a *safer, simpler and smarter* program. This bill will make U.S. transportation safe and secure, and also make our economy more efficient and productive.
- SAFETEA consolidates 8 highway safety grant programs that were operated under TEA-21 down to 3.
- SAFETEA extends the existing formula grant program while providing significant new resources for states to address the highway safety problems we have highlighted today.
- The Administration is putting significant weight into these two program areas. But consider this: In 2002, 42% of all motor vehicle fatalities were alcohol related. Nearly 60% of those who died were not wearing safety belts. SAFETEA addresses these 2 areas.
 - Occupant Protection
 - States that enact primary safety belt laws would be eligible for a one-time grant that is equal to 5 times their base 402 grant award.

 - Alternatively, states that achieve 90% usage without a primary belt law can receive this one-time incentive grant of 5 times their base 402 amount for FY03.

- Alcohol

These discretionary grants are designed to provide additional support of up to \$50M per year to the 10-12 states with the highest alcohol crash and fatality rates.

This is significant funding designed to allow for an assessment of the state's problem and targeted countermeasure design.

- This provides a total of \$340M. SAFETEA provides incentives to states to achieve a reduction in different categories of highway fatalities.
- Approximately \$55M annually will be distributed to states that reduce total fatalities; alcohol-related fatalities; or motorcycle, bicycle, and pedestrian fatalities.
- States that adopt and implement a strategic highway safety plan are provided the option to flex highway infrastructure funds for safety purposes and vice-versa.
- Why is this plan important? Because there is significant funding in this Act, and if you want your share you will have to develop a plan and follow it.
- States are required to develop a Strategic Highway Safety Plan based on a collaborative process that is data-based and involves engineering, education, behavior and enforcement. Plans would be submitted to U.S. DOT for approval.
- Good data and analysis are critical to sound problem identification and effective allocation of scarce resources.
- The Strategic Highway Safety Plan that allows state flexibility in the use of funds will need to be based on sound, effective data systems.
- This proposal would provide \$50M annually to allow states to enhance data collection, transfer, storage and analysis.
- This provides for a total of \$60 million in formula grants to help build capacity in state EMS systems and support E-911 development.
- This funding will buttress stronger state EMS infrastructure and planning.
- And now I am happy to introduce my colleague, Annette Sandberg. Annette.....