

League of American Bicyclists' Bike Summit
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“Increasing Bicycle Safety”

- I want to thank John Burke for those kind words about me and for inviting me here today.
- Good to be here today from the U.S. Department of Transportation, representing Secretary Norman Mineta.
- As you already heard I am the Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which is an agency within the US Department of Transportation.
- When we're talking about bicycling safety, we're talking about more than just my agency. We're really talking about the whole U.S. Department of Transportation.
- Improving the safety of the bicycling public is our mission across the board in the US DOT. This responsibility belongs to the Federal Highway Administration when they plan and design the physical environment where bicyclists ride, to the Federal Railroad Administration where trains and bicycling cross, to the Federal Transit Administration where bicycle riders and mass transit intersect, and to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, the agency that keeps the data.
- This is all in addition to my own agency, where we have been charged by Congress to reduce deaths and injuries on the Nation's highways.
- So I am here today to speak with you not only on behalf of my boss, the U.S. Secretary of Transportation, but also for a number of my colleagues who head up these other agencies in the Department: Mary Peters, Jenna Dorn, Allan Rutter and Rick Kowalewski.
- The Secretary and the President have made clear to all of us at DOT that the number one transportation priority is the safety and security of all Americans.
- At the Department of Transportation we have joined together to become architects of the future, to never accept “good” as good enough when it comes to safety. Instead, we want to make sure that, first and foremost, we are all safety advocates.

- Our work to improve highway safety could be summed up with these words: "Business NOT as usual." We are not going to accept the highway deaths and injuries that have become far too commonplace.
- We are striving to be pioneers in transportation, to reach out with new solutions to achieve new results. I'll be talking about some of those today.
- But the real reason I am here is this conference, this Bike Summit 2003. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the League of American Bicyclists have worked together over many years in preventing injuries and fatalities and educating bicyclists about safe biking practices.
- You have been our colleagues in efforts to improve the safety of all bicyclists. This includes the technical assistance and support you provide when we develop public education, training curricula, materials and a number of other activities that are all designed to increase bicycling safety.
- This shared history is important as we move toward the safety goals for the Nation.
- The Secretary made sure that our safety goals are aligned with the President's top priority as well as aligned across agencies within the Department.
- This goal, to reduce the fatality rate to not more than 1.0 per 100 million vehicle miles traveled by 2008, is an effort shared by our sister agencies in the Department of Transportation.
- In addition, a 10% reduction in bicyclist injuries and fatalities by the end of 2005 (from a baseline in 1999) is specifically called for in the Department of Transportation Strategic Plan.
- Our Strategic Plan has identified how we can do this through a number of approaches, including public information, legislation, enforcement, engineering, and outreach to improve the safety of bicyclists.
- We are serious about reaching these goals. We are just as serious as we were when Congress mandated that my Department create the new Transportation Security Administration within a short timeframe. We did that, and met all of the 35 goals that Congress set for us. We are now turning that dedication to road safety.
- Meeting these goals will be a challenge on many levels. In 2001 there were 728 bicyclists who lost their lives and another 45,000 who were injured in traffic crashes.

- As shown in the handout at your tables, we have had some good years and some not-so-good years as we move toward our goals.
- Last year the news was mixed. While bicyclist injuries in traffic collisions decreased 12% from the prior year, there was a 5% increase in bicyclist fatalities.
- Within these overall numbers there are some target areas where we know that we can - and should - do more. Alcohol impairment is one of these.
- As you can see in the pie chart, more than 30% of adult bicyclists (age 21+) who were killed in traffic crashes in 2001 were intoxicated (BAC \geq .08)
- Riding a bicycle while impaired by alcohol is just irresponsible. We don't want people riding a bicycle impaired anymore than we want them driving a motor vehicle while impaired.
- Children killed in biking collisions represent another target area that deserves special attention. More than a fifth (21%) of the bicyclists killed in traffic crashes in 2001 were between 5 and 15 years of age.
- The data are striking. They show that the death rate for this age group in 2000 was 4.1 per million population – nearly double the rate for all bicyclists (2.5 per million population).
- The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is, above all, a safety agency. We know safety. And bicycle helmets are the single most effective safety device for reducing traumatic brain injuries and deaths.
- As an emergency physician who has treated far too many people who were hurt while bike riding, I can tell you without a doubt that helmet use is the best, easiest, and surest way to combat many of these injuries.
- In all my years of medical practice I have never met the family of a patient in the ICU who was happy they weren't wearing a helmet.
- Yet across the nation helmet use is very low, at best only about 20% to 25%. And the percentage is closer to zero for teen riders.
- Currently about 20 States and more than 80 local jurisdictions have bicycle-helmet laws, but these law are almost entirely directed toward youth.
- If each rider wore a helmet, an estimated 500 bicycle-related fatalities would be prevented each year – that's more than one death each day.
- There is wide-ranging agreement about this among the experts. A study at Harborview Medical Center in Washington State found that wearing a bicycle

helmet reduces the risk of serious head injury by 85% and the risk for brain injury by 88%.

- The League recognized the value of helmets and other safe biking practices when they joined with NHTSA in the development of the National Strategies for Advancing Bicycle Safety.
- This is a document developed by a diverse group of bicycle advocates, injury prevention specialists, and government representatives.
- It is a call to action for policy makers, educators, advocates, transportation experts, health and injury professionals, and others. It goes well beyond anything done in the past to promote a safer cycling environment.
- The strategies included in the document are national in scope but the efforts are local in their application.
- Over the next three to five years we expect that you and we will use these strategies to build strong local support and capacity to improve safe bicycling for riders of all ages.
- There are five goals outlined in the National Strategies:
 - Motorists will share the road
 - Bicyclists will ride safely
 - Bicyclists will wear helmets
 - The legal system will support safe bicycling
 - Roads and paths will accommodate bicyclists
- How will we achieve these goals?
- We know what works. All the research and evaluation completed to date clearly show that **partnerships, data, and products** help us improve safety and yield measurable results.
- **Partnerships** - I commend the League for advancing the National Strategies by sponsoring 2 educational conferences – one last June and one due this coming June. And NHTSA is working cooperatively with organizations across the country to find the best ways to implement the National Strategies.
- **Data** - All of our efforts to improve the health and safety of bicycle riders are only as good as the data on which they are based. We need quality, reliable data to identify the problems and measure our successes.
- Some of that was discussed in this morning's breakout session on statistics that included the bicyclist and pedestrian survey that NHTSA and our Bureau of

Transportation Statistics conducted. But that does not resolve all of the data issues.

- One of my top priorities at NHTSA this year is to improve the quality, accuracy and completeness of state data systems.
- Some people believe there is a “blame the victim” perspective in law enforcement reports of bicyclist and pedestrian fatalities and injuries.
- This reminds me of the situation back in the 1950's, where people routinely assumed that the driver did something wrong whenever there was a crash.
- Now we know better. Today we know there is a wide range of factors that can contribute to crash causation.
- We learned about these other driver-vehicle-environmental factors over the years through improved data systems.
- The first Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration was Dr. Bill Haddon, who recognized the importance of these factors. He identified a series of injury prevention strategies that are directly related to bicycle safety. For example:
 - Separate the hazard from what you want to protect (bike lanes or dedicated bike paths)
 - Modify the rate of the hazard (reduce vehicle speeds)
 - Improve resistance to injuries (bicycle helmets)
- We can all use these strategies to inform our choices in making safety improvements for bicyclists, just as we have for drivers.
- I believe that there is still much to learn about bicyclist injury and fatality factors, but we are not yet as sophisticated about bicycle data as we are with motor vehicle data.
- Data drive our programs and provide the scientific basis from which we make decisions. We need to make these data more reliable, more timely, accessible, accurate and compatible for integration.
- As one of my top agency priorities this year, we are working with State level data systems to improve the quality of these data.
- **Products** - A number of products have been developed that will help all of us promote bicycling safety.

- There is the National Strategies document that I mentioned earlier, a “Ride Smart” video, a Bikeability Checklist, and many others.
- I invite you to stop by the NHTSA table in the exhibit area to pick up a copy of any of these items.
- Meanwhile, work continues at the National level. Within the Department of Transportation the activities of FHWA and NHTSA are complimentary in training, education, and infrastructure to improve bicycling safety.
- In addition to the NHTSA activities that I just mentioned, FHWA is developing tools to better categorize bicycle crashes, assess hazards at intersections, and evaluate the safety and operation of shared use paths for all users.
- FHWA also funds the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center, a national web-based clearinghouse that hosts more than 40,000 visitors each month. The Center is yet another sponsor of today’s National Bike Summit.
- During this conference I know that one of your topics of discussion is the Safe Routes to School program. This program promotes biking and walking to school.
- It enjoys the support of physical activity advocates as a way to increase physical activity among children, leading to lifelong health benefits.
- It also enjoys the support Congressman Oberstar. As you know, there is no greater advocate for safety and for bicyclists than the Congressman.
- Safe Routes to School is meant to make communities more livable by helping to decrease traffic congestion around schools.
- As the safety agency we are very supportive of Safe Routes to School because the program has a strong injury prevention component as well.
- A toolkit is now available that schools may use in setting up their own Safe Routes to School program. You may pick up a copy of the toolkit at the NHTSA table.
- What else can you do? Here are some *action items* to increase bicycling and bicycle safety for all:
 - Look for ways to *incorporate bicycling and bicycling safety into other injury prevention programs* by working with groups you might not be used to working with, such as schools, health and medical professionals and law enforcement. Safe Routes to School is a great example of where you are starting to do this, especially by working with health and physical activity professionals.

- *Work with police to ensure safe cycling.* Enlist their help in making sure the rules of the road are enforced for both drivers and cyclists.
 - Also, *find ways to discourage impaired riding.* I showed you that 30% of fatally injured bicyclists are impaired. I need your help to solve this problem.
 - Before too long Congress will ask us to *document usage of bicycling trails and facilities* constructed with Federal money. We will need your help to find ways to measure trail and bike lane use. I am asking you to consider how this can be done.
- Speaking of trails and lanes, it is good to know that Federal support for them is available.
 - In fact, there have been considerable increases – nearly 20-fold – in Federal support for bicycle and pedestrian improvements over the last 10 years or so. A graphic that tracks these funding changes was placed at everyone's seat earlier today.
 - As you think about ways to increase safe bicycling in your own communities, you should know that bicycle projects are eligible for funding from all of the major surface transportation programs.
 - Decisions on which projects to fund are made at the State and local levels of government. Make certain that your voices are heard when these decisions are made.
 - Before I go I want to mention the Department's reauthorization that is currently underway. The Administration will soon unveil the details of our proposed legislation and looks forward to working with Congress on its swift passage.
 - Every State will be asked to submit a comprehensive highway safety plan that pinpoints the nature of their safety problem.
 - Our proposal calls for increased funding flexibility for State and local authorities in transportation projects, to enable them to address specific areas of concern. Under the Secretary's leadership, improving safety in the reauthorization package continues to be our highest transportation priority.
 - Which brings me to the end of my time with you. The challenge for us in injury prevention is to work with engineers, planners, advocates and users to create an environment that will meet the goals of increasing physical activity while also increasing safety.

- This will be a challenge. But remember - these are not just my goals or your goals. These are goals for the Nation. With your critical help we have the opportunity to make progress in saving bicyclists' lives and preventing injuries from crashes with motor vehicles.
- I thank you for the invitation to participate in your Summit today, and wish you a useful and productive conference.