

**REMARKS PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL HIGHWAY  
TRAFFIC SAFETY  
ADMINISTRATOR JEFFREY W. RUNGE, M.D.**

**ASIA-PACIFIC ECONOMIC COOPERATION  
23<sup>rd</sup> MEETING OF THE TRANSPORTATION WORKING  
GROUP  
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**Greetings**

- Thank you for that kind introduction Kevin, and let me take this opportunity to congratulate you on being elected as the new Lead Shepherd of the Transportation Working Group. We are proud of your representation of the United States within this important working group.
- Director-General Wang, distinguished transportation leaders and delegates, good morning!
- It is an honor to join you here today to speak, on behalf of the President George Bush, U.S. Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta and my agency, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. This is the lead agency in the U.S. for **road safety**.
- Mr. Sample, you have described the APEC transportation goals of improved commerce, productivity, security and safety. It is on that note that I come to you today to speak about the urgent topic of road safety.

**Global Road Safety Situation**

- Why Road Safety? Because we recognize that road crash-related deaths and injuries have reached epidemic proportions worldwide.
- Every year on the roadways of the world an estimated 1.2 million people die as a result of road crashes, and another 25 to 35 million more are injured.
- We all know that road crashes can be pervasive. They do not discriminate by income level, gender, race or nationality.
- The economic and social cost of these crashes to the global community is estimated at 518 billion dollars (U.S.), with emerging economies bearing much of that burden. That sum represents human and financial resources that could be spent in other areas like infrastructure development, medical research, or education.

- In Asia alone, data show that road crashes account for more than 40 percent of all fatalities, which translates into half a million deaths and more than ten million injuries every year in this region.
- We are not willing to accept these losses as the price for increased mobility, whether in developed economies or emerging economies. As Secretary Mineta said last week at the United Nations General Assembly, morbidity does not need to be the price we pay for mobility.

## World Health Day

- Perhaps the most compelling reason for discussing road safety is the fact that these deaths are predictable. Because they are predictable we can prevent them – we know what to do to interrupt the process.
- This is a disease like any other, with an epidemiological basis, with populations at risk, with seasonal variations, and with other predictable factors. And this can be managed like any other epidemic.
- The APEC Transport Ministers were clear on this point two years ago at the Ministerial meeting in Lima, when they jointly identified improved road safety as a top priority and embraced the idea of a comprehensive road safety effort in APEC.
- The message was also clear two weeks ago on April 7, when Secretary Mineta and I met with President Chirac and other global transportation and health leaders in Paris to observe World Health Day.
- For the first time in its 50-year history, this year World Health Day focused on **Road Safety**, in recognition of the significant burden that road traffic crashes impose on the global community in terms of devastating human losses as well as economic costs.
- As part of the World Health Day observation, President Chirac released the *World Report on Road Traffic Injury Prevention*, which was jointly prepared by experts from many countries under the auspices of the World Health Organization and the World Bank.
- A key component of the *World Report* is the Recommendations. These offer guidance about how to tackle the challenges in road safety.
- First, the *Report* recommends the establishment of a single, central agency for Road Safety with a clear mission and legislative authority.
- Second, the *Report* recommends that the central agency be provided adequate funding dedicated only to road safety.

- Next, the *Report* recommends that this agency collect and analyze road crash data, in order to develop a scientific basis for its policies and decision-making.
- Fourth, the *Report* recommends that the policies and strategies be comprehensive, taking into account all three key aspects of road safety: the road user, safety performance of vehicles, and the road infrastructure.
- We have the tools and **now** is the time to implement our leaders' vision. We must act with urgency.

### **US Experience and Approach**

- We faced this grim prospect in the US in the mid-1960s, when we had a death rate of 3.5 per every 100 million vehicle kilometers traveled.
- The action we took when our agency was started almost forty years ago was along the same lines recommended in the *World Report*: the actions were comprehensive and data-based, and because of that, they were successful. Good data drives effective policy.
- If we had not taken the steps that we did, we would have experienced a doubling of the death toll in the U.S. over those 40 years.
- Instead, I am proud to say that even with the changes the U.S. has experienced in population size and increased motorization, we were able to cut the death rate by 72 percent. It is now 1 fatality per 100 million vehicle kilometers traveled.
- Although we have come a long way, we are not satisfied. We still lose about 43,000 lives on our roads each year. Every life is important...and most of these deaths are entirely preventable.
- I recognize that the challenges in road safety differ from place to place throughout the world.
- In our United States, vehicle occupants comprise the largest proportion of road traffic fatalities. But in the economies of this region, it is more likely than motorcyclists, pedestrians or bicyclists are killed or injured.
- However, currently many APEC economies are experiencing dramatic increases in motorization, which has outpaced the infrastructure development. We can expect vehicle occupant fatalities to rise as that occurs.
- Different problems in differing economies will require different solutions. Still, there is

much we can learn from one another.

- The United States, and my agency in particular, is ready to share its experience with the global community and especially with our partners in the Pacific Asia region, to prevent road deaths and injuries.
- It is my sincere hope that this group will emphasize road safety as a priority, and that this year will mark the beginning of a new cooperative effort under the APEC umbrella. As a first step in this initiative, I would urge the APEC leaders to agree to sponsor a pilot road crash data system project in a volunteer economy.
- This project will focus on evaluating current traffic injury data systems and assessing their effectiveness, developing recommendations to improve them, and providing technical assistance to implement the recommendations.
- While the data project is only the first step and more work is ahead of us, it will be a step in the right direction. The improved data system will identify the most serious road safety problems in that economy to help us devise better strategies to address them.
- Moreover, we will ensure that the recommendations that come out of that project will be based on the data and that they will be transferable, so that all economies can benefit from this project.

### **Value of Cooperation**

- Before I conclude, I want to stress the value of synergy in this effort, and what better forum to do this than APEC, which draws upon the strength and collaboration among the individual economies and the transportation industry.
- APEC is a partnership that touches on all aspects of social and economic well-being: transportation, mobility, safety and security, energy, health, trade, education, prosperity.
- This partnership has recognized the vital importance of safe and efficient transportation systems throughout the Asia-Pacific region as an integral part of a continued large scale economic development.
- In Lima, in Paris, in New York, and today in Beijing, we must agree that the loss of human life and economic resources due to traffic crashes is unacceptable. These are not inevitable consequences of modern life, and there is something that we can do about this.
- So let's work together on strategies to reduce the number of road-related fatalities and injuries to fulfill the APEC vision and promise of greater opportunities and higher living standards for all.

- On behalf of President Bush, Secretary Mineta and the entire U.S. Delegation, let me thank you for your attention to this critical issue, and wish you much success in your discussions over the course of the week.
- Thank you.