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Before the

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE SUBCOMMITTEE ON HIGHWAYS AND TRANSIT
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Oversight of the U.S. Department of Transportation's Implementation of MAP-21 and Fiscal Year 2015 Budget Request for Surface Transportation

March 12, 2014

Good morning Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Norton, and Members of the Subcommittee. I appreciate this opportunity to testify before you today on the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's implementation of the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) and the President's budget proposal for Fiscal Year (FY) 2015.

Before I begin my comments on our implementation efforts, I would like to thank the members of the subcommittee for your work on reauthorizing the Nation's surface transportation programs. Every member of the subcommittee is aware of the challenges we face in ensuring roadway safety and NHTSA appreciates the strong highway safety priorities that you included in MAP-21 that will help us meet those challenges. I look forward to working with you to strengthen highway safety through a comprehensive four-year reauthorization of our surface transportation programs as the President has proposed. Finding a pathway forward is essential as highway safety remains a serious challenge for our nation.

U.S. Roadway Safety

In 2012, highway fatalities totaled 33,561, which is 1,082 more fatalities than the previous year. In the same year, an estimated 2.36 million people were injured in motor vehicle traffic crashes, compared to 2.22 million in 2011. As a result, an average of nearly 4 lives were lost and nearly 270 people were injured on America's roadways every hour in 2012.

The majority of the increase in deaths, 72 percent, occurred in the first quarter of the year. Most of those involved in this increase were motorcyclists and pedestrians. While this marks the first increase in fatalities since 2005, highway deaths over the past five years remain at historic lows. Fatalities in 2011 were at the lowest level since 1949 and, even with the increase in 2012, fatalities remained at the 1950 level. Preliminary estimates of crash fatalities for the

first half of 2013 indicate a 4.2 percent decrease in deaths compared to the same timeframe in 2012.

While Americans drove approximately the same amount of miles in 2012 as in the previous year, fatalities increased by 3.3 percent. In 2011 we also saw the lowest fatality rate ever recorded, with 1.10 deaths per 100 million vehicle miles traveled. The fatality rate rose to 1.14 in 2012. Other key statistics include the following:

- Fatalities among pedestrians increased for the third consecutive year to 4,743 lives lost (6.4 percent increase over 2011). The data showed the large majority of pedestrian deaths occurred in urban areas, not at intersections, at night and many involved alcohol.
- Motorcycle rider fatalities increased for the third consecutive year (7.1 percent increase over 2011). Ten times as many riders died not wearing a helmet in States without a universal helmet law than in States with such laws.
- Large-truck occupant fatalities increased for the third consecutive year (8.9 percent over 2011).
- Deaths in crashes involving drunk drivers increased 4.6 percent in 2012, taking 10,322 lives compared to 9,865 in 2011. The majority of those crashes involved drivers with a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.15 or higher – nearly double the legal limit.
- The number of people killed in distraction-affected crashes decreased slightly from 3,360 in 2011 to 3,328 in 2012; and the number of people injured increased 9 percent to an estimated 421,000 people from an estimated 387,000 people in 2011. NHTSA is working to improve the way it captures distraction-related crash data to better quantify and identify potential trends in this area.
- Nighttime seat belt use continues to be a challenge. In nighttime crashes in 2012, almost two-thirds of the people that died were unrestrained.

Safety and the President's Budget

The Administration continues to place safety at the forefront of everything the Department does. As many of the statistics above highlight, we have made tremendous progress, but significant ongoing work remains to be done to further reduce preventable traffic-related deaths. To improve the safety of America's roadways, within the President's budget for FY 2015 we request $851 million to enable the agency to continue to establish safety standards for motor vehicles and motor vehicle equipment; conduct research and development on vehicle safety and driver behavior; set and enforce fuel economy standards; operate the National Driver Register; and administer a comprehensive program of safety grants to the States. To put this request in perspective, the direct economic cost alone of motor vehicle crashes in the year 2000 was $230.6 billion. This budget request will support NHTSA's ongoing effort to save lives, reduce injuries, and lower the economic cost of crashes.

States are a vital partner in improving safety on our nation's roadways, so the FY 2015 budget requests $577 million for Highway Traffic Safety Grants. MAP-21 authorizes broad Section 402 Formula Grants that represent the backbone of NHTSA's State highway safety initiatives, the consolidated Section 405 National Priority Safety Program grants, as well as

grants supporting State efforts on occupant protection, impaired driving, motorcyclist safety, distracted driving, graduated driver's licensing, and traffic safety data.

In addition to this support for our core work, one of my priorities, and a priority for the Secretary, is continuing and enhancing efforts on pedestrian and bicycle safety. When he spoke at the Transportation Research Board in January, Secretary Foxx made clear that we must do more to address the safety of pedestrians and cyclists. Americans are increasingly embracing a new approach to work and school commutes that includes less time behind the wheel and more time walking or cycling. Sadly, as more Americans are leaving their cars at home, we're also seeing an increase in deaths among pedestrians and bicyclists. Pedestrian fatalities are up 6.4% over 2011, the third year in a row with an increase, and bicyclist fatalities are the highest in six years, up 6.5% over 2011.

We need to bring new resources and tried and true strategies to bear to better protect Americans when they choose to walk or ride their bikes. Last summer, DOT and NHTSA put the issue of pedestrian safety front and center, and $2 million in new pedestrian safety grants for States with cities that have the highest rates of pedestrian deaths will be awarded soon. We have a "Roll Model" program, which helps parents teach their young cyclists about safety and the rules of the road. We have also worked with our colleagues at the Federal Highway Administration to launch "Everyone is a Pedestrian," an education initiative and accompanying web site with safety tips and resources for local leaders, city planners, and others involved in keeping pedestrians safe. Moving forward, NHTSA also plans to increase our work with the States to implement education and enforcement components of the Pedestrian Safety Action Plans.

Older drivers are another area of focus for the agency. As the Baby Boomers age, they will stay on the roads longer and account for an increasingly large percentage of all drivers. While older drivers are safer drivers on average, older drivers (and passengers and pedestrians) are often more frail than their younger counterparts, and more likely to suffer serious injuries if involved in a crash. It is important that we continue to look for ways to mitigate the risks while maximizing the safe mobility of older citizens.

NHTSA also recognizes the enormous role technology can play in vehicle safety. The President's Budget request will support NHTSA's plans to expand the agency's focus on technology, specifically on crash avoidance technologies, and opportunities for in-vehicle technology to dramatically reduce drunk driving and significantly increase seat belt use. NHTSA will continue its efforts to make vehicles safer in the unfortunate event of a crash, but we will also expand our efforts on the role of technology to avoid those crashes in the first place.

Advances in technology are also providing new comforts and amenities for drivers and passengers. Our goal at NHTSA is to help usher in new technologies while filtering out new distractions. NHTSA will continue its efforts to ensure that drivers keep their focus on the task of driving, as we also look for ways that technology itself can minimize distractions.

Earlier this year, I was pleased to join Secretary Foxx in announcing the agency decision on Vehicle-to-Vehicle (V2V) technology. The cooperation between NHTSA, modal partners,

and stakeholders has allowed us to accelerate our efforts to initiate and complete research on V2V platforms designed to increase driver situational awareness and warn drivers to reduce and mitigate crashes. NHTSA believes V2V technology is viable and ready to be regulated for the light vehicle fleet, and soon we will be releasing a research report for public comment that will detail our preliminary observations about the readiness of the technology for regulation. NHTSA believes this cutting edge technology will give drivers information needed to make safe decisions on the road, and could potentially address as many as 70 to 80 percent of crashes involving non-impaired drivers once the entire vehicle fleet is equipped. When combined with vehicle-to-infrastructure (V2I) communication systems, this leading-edge technology also holds the potential for improving mobility and benefitting the environment by connecting vehicles not just with each other, but also with road infrastructure. NHTSA anticipates making a regulatory decision for V2V heavy vehicles late this year. NHTSA will also continue its efforts on the separate but complementary issue of the potential for increasing levels of vehicle automation to further help avoid crashes in the first place.

MAP-21 Implementation

MAP-21 consolidated the various grant programs from SAFETEA-LU, including impaired driving and occupant protection grants, with the new graduated driver licensing (GDL) and distracted driving grants, into a new Section 405 National Priority Safety Program. This unified grant program utilizes a single, consolidated application and annual deadline, easing the administrative burden on States and allowing them to focus their resources on the life-saving mission of traffic safety. Additionally, MAP-21 provided significant funds to address high-priority safety problems, including long-standing issues (such as impaired driving and occupant protection) and newer concerns (such as distraction).

Since enactment, implementing MAP-21 has been a major priority for NHTSA and the Department. I am proud of how quickly the NHTSA staff worked to implement key programs and get guidance out to the States. Less than two months after enactment, we issued a Notice of Funding Availability for the distracted driving grants, followed shortly thereafter with an interim final rule for the National Priority Safety Program grants. In an effort to be as responsive to the States as possible, we conducted several webinars with the State highway safety offices to walk them, step-by-step, through the new grant programs and the consolidated application process.

As you know, one of the most important things we can do to reduce roadway fatalities is to wear a seat belt. The most dramatic increases in seat belt use were in the southern States, rising to 87 percent in 2013—up from 80 percent in 2011. Seat belt use continues to be higher in States that have primary belt laws, which permit law enforcement officers to issue citations solely for not wearing a seat belt rather than requiring an officer to identify an additional traffic violation.

In spite of this progress, motor vehicle traffic crashes continue to be a leading cause of death in the nation, with particularly harmful effects on the younger age groups. In 2009, motor vehicle traffic crashes were the leading cause of death for 4-year old children as well as for individuals age 11 through 27. That is why programs such as GDL are so important and I am

pleased that Congress authorized incentive grants in MAP-21 to encourage more States to adopt such an approach for younger, inexperienced drivers.

In establishing the new grant programs to address graduated driver licensing, distracted driving, and ignition interlocks, Congress sought to incentivize States to establish effective laws. The eligibility criteria for these grants are based on sound principles, but have proven challenging for most States to meet. In FY 2013, 8 States received distracted driving grants, no States received GDL grants, and 2 States received alcohol ignition interlock grants. In FY 2014, 1 State qualified for the stricter distracted driving grants available that year, none for a GDL grant, and 4 for ignition interlock grants. NHTSA hopes that more States will qualify in the future, and NHTSA stands ready to provide technical assistance to Congress as it considers revising these grant programs.

Spending Federal resources efficiently and effectively is a priority for the President, the Secretary, the Department and this agency. Over the past year, NHTSA has hired new financial specialists, providing the agency with additional expertise in ensuring appropriate, effective spending that meets statutory and regulatory requirements.

NHTSA is also working to modernize the electronic infrastructure in managing the grant process. This modernization will create a turnkey solution for the States and for NHTSA, encompassing the life cycle of the grant programs from application to financial oversight and reporting. These changes, many of which were identified in conjunction with the States, will significantly reduce the burden and increase the efficiency of the grant application and monitoring processes.

Conclusion

As an agency, we at NHTSA are dedicated to our mission of safety. To that end, NHTSA works closely with the States and assists them in achieving their respective highway safety goals. We will continue this partnership to ensure that the remaining parts of MAP-21 are effectively implemented. We will work with this Committee to strengthen these efforts further through the enactment of the President's comprehensive four-year reauthorization plan. Together, we can continue to bring about meaningful improvements in highway safety and reductions in roadway fatalities.

Highway safety must always be a national priority, and Federal support for, and our partnership with, States will remain essential even as NHTSA is working towards technologies that can effectively eliminate impaired or unbelted driving and that can make our cars intelligent enough to avoid crashes in the first place.

Thank you again for inviting me to testify, and I am happy to take any questions that you may have.