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Written Statement of

Susan Martinovich, P.E.

Director, Nevada Department of Transportation
Vice Chair, Standing Committee on Highway Traffic Safety
Chair, Standing Committee on Research
American Association of State Highway and
Transportation Officials

"SAVING LIVES ON OUR NATION'S HIGHWAYS"

SENATE COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIROMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
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AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF STATE HIGHWAY AND TRANSPORTATION OFFICIALS
AASHTO
THE VOICE OF TRANSPORTATION

Founded in 1914, AASHTO represents the departments concerned with highway and transportation in the fifty States, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Its mission is a transportation system for the nation that balances mobility, economic prosperity, safety and the environment.

INTRODUCTION

Good morning Chairman Boxer and other distinguished Senators. I am Susan Martinovich, Director of the Nevada Department of Transportation. On behalf of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), in my capacity as Vice Chair of the Standing Committee on Highway Traffic Safety, and chair of the Safety Legislative Policy Team, let me start by thanking you for having this hearing early in the authorization process---- heightening the awareness highway safety is of the utmost importance for the health and prosperity of the nation.

I also thank the Congress for infusing Highway Safety with a new core $1 billion per year Federal –Aid Highway Program—the Highway Safety Improvement Program -- in SAFETEA-LU.

SAFETEA-LU made significant strides in enhancing the nation's focus on safety. The legislation significantly increased funding for safety programs, created new apportioned safety programs, and required all states to develop an evidence-based strategic highway safety plan. State DOTs are using these funds to implement effective solutions designed to drive down fatalities. The legislation is still in its infancy, thus making it difficult to assess the progress that each program has had in reducing fatalities and crashes, but we are very optimistic these measures and those we are recommending for future legislation will bring us closer to meeting and surpassing our goals. The AASHTO Board of Directors passed in May of 2007, the goal of halving fatalities over two decades. This translates to saving 1000 lives per year from the base number---we know that together we can do this.

The steady national level of 42,000 plus fatalities per year must end.

As a nation we must do better; with the support of the US Congress we can do better—our future depends on it.

CURRENT SITUATION

The National Safety Council reports that "Motor-vehicle deaths for January through May of 2008 totaled **15,840**."

While this number is still too high, it is following a 2-year downward trend. For the same time frame, we saw a peak in 2006. In 2007, the number decreased by 1% or 17, 490 lives, now in 2008 we are down another 9%. Percentages mean nothing. That 9% means 1650 lives are still here today. This isn't a pattern by any means, but a start and hopefully a continued trend as a result of the SAFETEA-LU initiatives.

Traffic crashes are the leading cause of death among 4 to 34 years-olds and annually our nation suffers over 42,000 fatalities with over 3 million more sustaining disabling injuries due to roadway crashes. The societal cost of crashes in just the larger metro areas is a staggering $164.2 billion annually. This is nearly two and a half times greater than the $67.6 billion price tag for congestion, as reported by AAA[1&2]. The national cost for crashes equates to an annual per person cost of $1,051, compared to $430 per person annually for congestion. I don't mean to downplay congestion by any means, especially coming from the fastest growing state in the country and home to Las Vegas, Nevada which enjoys over 43 million visitors a year and over 3000 people a month moving in to stay. I also was honored to present testimony to the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission with emphasis on simplifying project delivery to reduce congestion and enhance safety. Curing the safety problem greatly reduces the congestion problem. Over half of the congestion problem is caused by non-recurring incidents. Both safety and congestion need to be addressed aggressively if the nation is to prosper. The safety costs I mentioned include medical, emergency and police services, property damage, lost productivity, and quality of life, among other things. NHTSA has estimated the cost of all crashes---not just those in the larger cities--- to be about $230.6 billion per year[3] in year 2000 dollars.

The World Health Organization (WHO) forecasts that roadway fatalities and disabling injuries will be the second leading cause of productive days lost by 2015, second only to heart disease[4]. Furthermore, WHO also estimates the cost of road crash injuries at roughly 1-2% of gross domestic product in developed countries.

Solving the safety problem fosters real economic growth in this country.

Crashes don't just affect the urban centers of our country. While there may not be the same congestion issues, there are tremendous economic impacts. A fatal or severe crash incident in rural Nevada that closes Interstate-80 causes a chain reaction of impacts. Over 70% of the goods and commerce coming into the ports of California cross the very rural western states on the journey east. Closures due to crashes result in long detours. In Nevada this means over 100 miles of out of the way travel. This impacts delivery time and creates additional user costs, not to mention the impact to highways not necessarily designed to accommodate the loads carried on the interstate.

AASHTO Safety Authorization Proposal

Considering all that I've previously stated, AASHTO recommends a series of bold Congressional actions to continue our progress in reducing highway fatalities. These have recently been adopted in May of this year ---by my 51 peers and me --the State DOT leaders from around the nation.

1. National Agenda on Highway Safety

Congress should adopt a National goal of halving fatalities over two decades*; *call for and fund a National Summit on Highway Safety ($500,000) to include the US DOT, Members of Congress, State transportation and safety officials, and safety advocates; and fund a joint AASHTO-GHSA Safety Center of Excellence at $3 million per year.

AASHTO passed this goal in May, 2007 and we have worked with our public sector safety partners to have their leadership adopt this goal as well. To date many have done so –including the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA), American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA), Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance (CVSA), National Association of County Engineers (NACE); and others are working the proposal thru their policy approval processes such as the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP).

In addition, it matches the goal presented to the Congress by the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission. The goal also was supported at a Visioning Conference[5] held in Cambridge MD last year which was attended by over 50 Industry/governmental/and transport user associations representing all surface modes. Defining a national safety goal brings additional focus to the charge.

In support of a national summit, the last time the White House actively held a safety summit was in 1956—in conjunction with the launching of the Interstate Highway System---it would be fitting for the Congress to lead such a charge again as we fund the renewal and enhancement of that system for our future prosperity!!

2. Highway Safety Funding

Increase the flexibility and level of funding for all safety programs commensurate with increases in the other core programs' funding in order to meet the national safety goal.

All the states have developed and implemented a Strategic Highway Safety Plan. These were not developed in isolation of a DOT only, but are statewide collaboratively developed plans including local participation since not all crashes happen on state highways. These plans prioritize and lay out strategies and action plans for addressing state's most pressing safety needs ranging from infrastructure improvements and engineering to education and behavior; from enforcement activities to emergency response strategies. A priority for one state can be very different then for another. For example, trees and moose hits contribute to a large percentage of fatalities in the northeastern states. Nevada's one tree is heavily guarded and I'm not sure what a moose is. All jests aside, states following their safety plans should have the ability and flexibility to apply safety funding to where their most critical need lies, and where they can have the biggest impacts. However, we want accountability. The public should demand it!

Therefore, spending would be performance driven to really assure the most pressing needs are being addressed.

Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) recommendations include: Increase HSIP funding commiserate with the other core programs and include sufficient enhancements to continue the current funding level for the High Risk Rural Road Program; Update the Safe Routes to School Program to increase its focus on pedestrian safety and coordination with the State's Strategic Highway Safety Plan; Eliminate the requirement for developing and reporting the top five percent locations in each state currently exhibiting the most severe highway safety needs – the intended goals of this requirement are mostly addressed through the development and implementation of a state's Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP) and HSIP; To address those safety needs of our rail/highway partners and local governments and our walking and biking youths, continue the dedication of funding to the rail-highway grade crossing and Safe Routes To School program.

Consolidate NHTSA funding to the degree possible and streamline the grant application process

3. Strategic Highway Safety Plan Continuation

Continue the requirement that states develop and implement Strategic Highway Safety Plans (SHSP) consistent with their long-range transportation planning and short-range programming processes. Require e**ach State to update their plans at least once during the new authorization cycle and establish an aggressive State determined fatality reduction goal to help achieve the national goal.

An extraordinary amount of work and effort went into the development of the SHSP plans. They don't belong on a shelf. They need to be followed, revisited and measured. AASHTO is also encouraging each State's Governors Highway Safety Office and Department of Transportation (they are not necessarily under the same state cabinet position), to host a peer review with adjacent states -- furthering collaborative and partnership efforts and benefiting on sharing best practices.

4. Highway Safety Data Collection & Sharing

Support the further development of the NHTSA State Data System.

This system should include traffic & roadway characteristics, and injury outcome data. We want to encourage all states to participate with their individual statewide data sources that address and encompass the issues of collection, quality, management and linkage. AASHTO is requesting to provide $20 million per year to enhance the NHTSA State Data System, and ensure that the collection of data needed to support safety analysis for all public roads are eligible for HSIP and NHTSA safety funding and to provide funding ($500,000) to AASHTO and GHSA to develop guidance for states on implementing a data-collection-analysis system. We are also seeking to provide statutory changes needed to protect individual privacy while providing for the disclosure of information related to crashes.

Good data is the foundation for determining how and where money and efforts need to be focused.

5. Highway Safety Laws & Adjudication

Support a national effort, led by NHTSA, to develop and recommend model statutes and best practices to the States on ways to drive down fatalities, including rigorous enforcement and adjudication of those laws. ($750,000 per year)

Local and state law enforcement agencies are a key and critical component in reducing fatalities. They experience many challenges in their daily activities that can have an impact on highway safety, from critical law enforcement (work zones, speed, red light running, and aggressive driving) to exposure when having someone pulled over. They also play a key role in creating or compiling good crash data.

In many municipal and local courts, penalties against the traffic safety laws that are in place are commonly reduced, thus minimizing the emphasis on practices that have shown to work to save lives. Efforts to put responsibility back on drivers should be encouraged and supported.

6. Highway Safety Improvement in Vehicles

Recommend that the Congress incorporate technical safety improvements in vehicles more expeditiously through federal incentives, and through regulatory and research and development initiatives.

The recent USDOT rulemaking on electronic automated stability systems in all vehicles produced after 2012 is estimated by the USDOT to save at least 5,000 deaths per year from the base.

Provide General Fund assistance either through tax credits or on a cost sharing basis to early adopters of auto and truck vehicle advanced safety systems.

This can help spur needed economic growth in a languishing industry and support our national goal of saving lives thru a safer vehicle fleet.

7. Highway Safety Research, Development & Technology

Enhance the level of funding for safety research, development and technology, and expand the coordination between research entities. Increase funding for safety research in the following areas: ITS R&D, FHWA research, SHRP2 Research, NHTSA research, and FMCSA research, and eliminate safety research designations that have not been identified as part of the National Agenda on Highway Safety.

Specific Recommendations include:

- Increase the overall FHWA research program to $200 million per year.
- Support overall SHRP 2 implementation funding for all areas, not just safety, at a level of $75 million per year and as a takedown from federal-aid apportionments.
- Increase the overall NHTSA research program to $20 million per year.
- Increase the overall FMCSA research program to $15 million per year.
- Provide $1 million to FHWA to quantify and qualify the benefits of the safety aspects of other modes (transit, non-motorized)
- Provide $1 million to NHTSA to study certain vehicle and behavioral safety issues

- Request that the U.S. Department of Transportation review and consider modifying regulations to permit greater flexibility in use of proprietary products on road improvement projects that are beneficial to the public interest, especially those that can provide safety benefits to the public[6].

Research provides an important tool to discovery or vetting out a feasible solution for minimal cost.

8. Safety Improvements in Drivers

Provide $5 Million to complete the modernization of the Commercial Driver Licensing Information System (CDLIS) needed to fully implement "One Driver-One Record." Provide $14 Million in General Fund support thru the DHS for the final phase of the information hub to allow motor vehicle agencies to implement a one-driver one license system.

These recommendations are supportive of our sister state organization, AAMVA.

CONCLUSIONS

Safety is not just a catch phrase or a feel good word. The number of fatalities is not just data or a rate to compare over the years. Safety on our transportation system means we go home to our families every day. It means that we will live through our less then perfect moments to drive another day.

Drivers should take responsibility for their actions, and we as a nation should take responsibility for a safe transportation system. We need to break through the plateau. A clear way to success is to do something different and to push through that steady level of over 42,000 deaths per year with more focus and intensity – to bring people home. This is possible.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before the committee and let me assure you that AASHTO representing the states, is a very strong safety advocate, we are anxious to be part of the solution, and we stand ready to assist you in your legislative deliberations.

References:

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6. ***HIGHWAY SAFETY: ADDRESSING LANE DEPARTURE FATALITIES AND INJURIES,*** AASHTO Board of Directors Joint Policy Statement with the AGC and ARTBA, October 2007.