Statement of
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before the

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Chairman Boxer, Ranking Member Inhofe, and Members of the Committee:

I am Greg Cohen, President and CEO of the American Highway Users Alliance. I am very pleased to be invited back to the Committee to present testimony on opportunities to increase highway safety. Increasing safety on our nationôs roads, highways, and bridges should be a top priority in the upcoming surface transportation bill. As advocates for the motoring public, a safe and efficient national highway system is our highest priority.

About The American Highway Users Alliance

Formed 78 years ago, the American Highway Users Alliance (The Highway Users) is a non-profit organization that promotes federal, state, and local policies that improve safety and mobility. We bring together a wide range of users that contribute to the Highway Trust Fund. Our members include AAA clubs, trucking and bus companies, motorcyclists and RVers. These members and several hundred other member businesses and associations represent millions of highway users from coast-to-coast. Safe, reliable, and efficient roads facilitate the movement of our families, employees, customers, and products. The Highway Users has worked closely with Congress on every major highway bill as a stakeholder and grassroots advocate for a strong and trustworthy Highway Trust Fund.

Increasing Highway Investment Will Improve Highway Safety

The need for high quality roads has deep roots in a universal desire that our friends, families, and loved-ones arrive home safely each day. Simply stated, the greater the degree of investment in highway infrastructure, the safer the motoring public. Yet, as we underfund our aging highway system, substandard and inadequate roads continue to contribute to at least one-third of all highway fatalities, according to USDOT. In fact, this statistic may be far greater, if one considers that we now have road safety hardware that can prevent almost any vehicle from running-of-the-road. These road departure crashes are the single largest type of fatal crash in nearly every state and account for the majority of fatal crashes nationwide.

Federal Highway Administration data suggests that infrastructure improvements, such as the construction of a new bridge or installation of barriers on roads, can reduce location-specific fatalities by up to eighty-six percent. This all boils down to a single point that we in the safety community often find ourselves repeating: Most highway deaths can be prevented.

And when funding is not available for needed safety improvements, there are real human victims. For example, in the past two years, ten people have died on a four-mile stretch of Georgia Highway 56. In this case, the cause of these deaths has been attributed to an unusually short turning lane, but Georgia DOT estimates that funding shortfalls will prevent a fix until at least 2013. Deaths like these are plainly unacceptable.

Ensuring that tragedies like these do not happen should be a top priority for all stakeholders, and investing in our highway infrastructure is an important part of this process. To that end, we believe that the next surface transportation authorization bill should include both a major increase in highway funding levels, as well as a well-funded and improved safety core program within the highway title. With such a strong relationship between the quality of our infrastructure and the safety of our roadways, few things are more important.

The 4 Es + I

Highway crashes are the largest single cause of death for children and young adults aged 3-34. Highway deaths and injuries are a national epidemic that requires federal leadership to address. We recommend that legislators approach highway safety by addressing the ñ4Esò ï to which we add an important ñIò. The Eôs are: Engineering, Education, Enforcement, and EMS. ñIò stands for Investment.

Engineering: Improved existing roads, roadside safety treatments, and engineering innovations -- like retroreflective signs and markings, skid-resistant pavements, safety barriers, roundabouts, and rumble strips are effective in preventing accidents, injuries, and fatalities on the roads where they are implemented.

Education: Public education campaigns are essential to ensuring that the motoring public is informed on relevant law, new technologies, and defensive driving techniques that make the road a safer place. The Roadway Safety educational program, discussed later in this testimony, is an important part of that effort.

Enforcement: Traffic laws are an important deterrent to unsafe driving habits, and effective enforcement of reasonable laws is vital in ensuring that roads are safe for the motorists that drive on them. The EPW Committee has authorized financial incentives to promote more effective traffic enforcement laws.

Investment: Finally, little national progress can be realized with the ñ4Esò unless there are strong federal financial investments in good highway programs.

Safety Progress & Lessons Learned Under SAFETEA-LU

Together in the past year, local, state, and federal highway authorities have had much to be proud of regarding road safety. Most notably, 2009 saw an almost ten percent reduction in road fatalities from 2008, even as vehicle-miles-traveled increased. This fatality reduction continues a five-year trend of that we believe results at least in substantial part from the SAFETEA-LU legislation authored by this committee in 2005. Moreover, the successful implementation of SAFETEA-LUôs newly authorized Strategic Highway Safety Plans is a further testament to the leadership of this committee in achieving tangible safety improvements across the country.

In many ways, the program structure of the 2005 surface transportation bill is very similar to the preceding authorization bills from 1998 (TEA 21) and 1991 (ISTEA). The one major exception was the creation of a new $1 billion safety ñcoreò program, called the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP). We consider the HSIP program to be the most important achievement in the SAFETEA-LU bill. The HSIP program served as the first performance-based ñcoreò highway program, requiring states to develop a strategic highway safety plan (SHSP) to improve safety, address recognized deficiencies, and strategically invest in safety.

Before SAFETEA-LU was enacted, fatalities were slowly rising. But since 2005, the year that SAFETEA-LU passed, highway fatalities have dropped by 22 percent from 43,510 deaths in 2005 to 33,963. In 2009, almost 10,000 fewer people were killed on our roads than in 2005.

Despite Progress, We Cannot Rest With 34,000 Deaths and Millions Injured

However, even as we celebrate this accomplishment, we realize that there is still immense work to be done. As USDOT Secretary LaHood observed, the 34,000 highways deaths that occurred last year were preventable. We must take the steps necessary to ensure that we accelerate this promising trend of improved safety so that even fewer of our friends and loved-ones are killed on our highways in each ensuing year. The first step is crafting a reauthorization bill that places a top priority on safer highways.

There is no doubt that increased strategic investments in highway safety improvements have made a positive impact. Still, an average of 93 people died each day. As the HSIP program developed, some problems became apparent. Congress has the opportunity in the next surface transportation bill to help states become more proactive in their safety investments, by clarifying that location-specific crash data can be used to support systemic safety improvements in the SHSPs.

For the first time ever, SAFETEA-LU also included dedicated funding for roadway safety educational pilot programs (Sec. 1411). These funds have been granted by USDOT to the Roadway Safety Foundation (RSF), a charitable/educational organization chartered by The Highway Users, to improve public awareness of roadway safety. Since 2005, RSF pilot programs have focused on deployment of: lifesaving, low-cost cable

median barriers; rumble strips; and a variety of techniques to make roads safer for seniors. We strongly support reauthorizing this Road Safety section and request an increase in dedicated funding for new educational campaigns and national deployment of the most successful current pilot campaigns.

We must also improve safety research and data collection. For example, safety data related to *injuries* is spotty and inconsistent across the country. Also, we are disappointed that the motorcycle crash causation study authorized under SAFTEA-LU has not been completed, apparently due to a lack of adequate research funding.

The Highway Users Authorization Plan: Safety

Safety is the most important goal of The Highway Users. Our attached authorization proposal reflects that. We ask for your careful consideration of its contents. The Highway Usersô plan envisions moving quickly towards zero deaths on American roads. To that end, we support increasing highway user fees to support a significantly more robust highway program. Within the expanded federal-aid highway program, we support dedicating 10% of all authorized federal-aid highway funds for roadway safety projects and providing this program with its own special obligation-limitation. We also support a more robust performance-based program that creates incentives and penalties that help States meet their proportional share of national fatality reduction targets.

Pending Legislation to Incorporate into the Surface Transportation Bill

The Highway Users has reviewed several safety-related bills drafted or introduced by Members of the 111th Congress. We appreciate the opportunity to bring several excellent proposals to your attention and ask that you advance them to enactment:

1) **The Surface Transportation Safety Act of 2009 (S. 791).** Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee Chairman Baucus has introduced S. 791, which will improve work zone safety standards, including positive protection and high visibility garments for workers; stimulate product innovation by allowing State DOTs to use the latest advanced proprietary safety products; set deadlines for the adoption of new minimum retroreflectivity levels for pavement markings; improve highway-rail grade crossings; and improve rural highway safety. The Highway Users has joined AGC of America, the Association of American Railroads, the International Union of Police Associations, and the Railroad Supply Institute to endorse this life-saving bill.

2) **High Risk Rural Road Safety Act.** The Highway Users, along with the other members of the Rural Infrastructure Safety Coalition (RISC), have endorsed this draft legislation, which would authorize $1 billion per year for the High Risk Rural Roads (HRRR) program, authorized for the first time in SAFETEA-LU. At $90 million/year, the current program is too small to have a serious impact on rural road safety. However, two-lane rural roads are by far the most dangerous

highways and the HRRR program should be reauthorized and funding increased to make rural roads safe. Half of all fatalities are on locally owned roads and this bill would also provide needed assistance to local governments for addressing their rural road safety problems. Our partners in RISC include AAA, American Public Works Association, American Society of Civil Engineers, American Society of Highway Engineers, American Traffic Safety Services Association (ATSSA), National Association of Counties, National Association of County Engineers, and National Association of Development Organizations.

3) **Older Driver and Pedestrian Safety and Roadway Enhancement Act (H.R. 3355).** The Highway Users, along with the other members of the Coalition for Older Roadway Users Safety (CORUS), support this bipartisan legislation, which would fund a roadway safety enhancement program for older drivers and pedestrians. A similar program was authorized but not funded in SAFETEA-LU. By 2025, one in four drivers will be over the age of 65. This bill will help States prepare for this demographic shift by improving signs, markings, intersection designs, crosswalks, etc. These improvements not only benefit older Americans; they make the roads safer for everyone else as well. Our partners in CORUS include AARP, ATSSA, National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, and Transportation for America.

Funding Incentives and Sanctions

Last year, the House Transportation & Infrastructureôs Committeeôs Subcommittee on Highways and Transit reported its authorization bill, which includes a series of provisions imposing new or increased sanctions on states. These include withholding a portion of federal-aid highway dollars unless specific state laws are enacted. The Highway Users generally supports incentives and opposes sanctions to give states maximum flexibility to solve traffic safety problems in their own ways without cutting highway funding. Incentives based on results encourage innovation.

However, there is no doubt that increased seatbelt use is an essential life-saving practice and the value of primary seatbelt laws is extraordinary. The Highway Users would like to work with the Committee to help ensure that all States enact primary seat belt enforcement laws, while also ensuring that funding for highway safety projects is held harmless or increased under any safety incentive or sanction plan. The evidence is extraordinary that aggressive seatbelt laws could save tens of thousands of lives. Although nearly 85% of vehicle occupants are buckled-up on our highways, more than half of those killed in car crashes are not wearing seatbelts.

Conclusions

This Committee has an extraordinary opportunity to help save tens of thousands of lives by expeditiously authorizing a well-funded highway program with a forward-thinking, performance-based, robust safety program.

There are other safety issues facing other committees, such as those addressing the vehicles themselves. In the past, the Commerce Committee was largely successful in advancing incredible progress in vehicle safety by supporting incredible feats of structural engineering and technological advancements like electronic stability control. Educational programs have also improved our safety culture over the past 25 years, with major shifts in national attitudes toward dangerous behaviors like driving under the influence and not wearing seatbelts has increasingly made these behaviors socially unacceptable. We must continue to make progress in these areas.

But efforts in other areas must be matched with progress on the highway safety issues faced by this Committee. In particular, we think it is essential that the nation make the same kind of safety progress in improving the condition and safety environment of our roads and roadside environment that we have made in improving our vehicles. This will require a determined effort! Our roads have changed much more slowly than our vehicle technology. In most cases we have better drivers and better vehicles, but theyôre using the same old, inadequate roads ï many with hairpin turns, inadequate signs and markings, aging bridge rails, narrow lanes, inadequate shoulders, and nonexistent roadside protection. More investment is needed. This Committee can take aggressive action to make roads safer as part of the surface transportation authorization bill. The American Highway Users Alliance greatly appreciates being your partner in this effort.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.