

Hearing on MAP-21 Implementation

**Statement of the Honorable David L. Strickland
Administrator, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration**

House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Highway and Transit

March 14, 2013

Good morning Mr. Chairman, ranking member DeFazio 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).

Before I begin my comments on our implementation efforts, I would like to thank the members of this committee for your work on reauthorizing the Nation's surface transportation programs. Every member of this committee is aware of the challenges we face in ensuring roadway safety and that's why we appreciate the highway safety priorities enumerated in MAP-21. We also appreciate the authorization for two years of predictable surface transportation funding that will enable states to plan their highway safety programs.

Highway fatalities fell to 32,367 in 2011, marking the lowest level since 1949 and a 1.9 percent decrease from the previous year. The historic downward trend in recent years continued through 2011 and represent a 26 percent decline in traffic fatalities overall since 2005. For the first time since 1981 (when data were first available), motor vehicle traffic crashes **were not** among the top 10 causes of death in the United States.

While Americans drove fewer miles in 2011 than in 2010, the nearly two percent drop in roadway fatalities significantly outpaced the corresponding 1.2 percent decrease in vehicle miles traveled. In 2011 we also saw the lowest fatality rate ever recorded, with 1.10 deaths per 100 million vehicle miles traveled in 2011, down from 1.11 deaths per 100 million vehicle miles traveled in 2010. Other key statistics include:

- Fatalities declined by 4.6 percent for occupants of passenger cars and light trucks (including SUVs, minivans and pickups).
- Drunk driving fatalities dropped 2.5 percent in 2011, taking 9,878 lives compared to 10,136 in 2010.
- The number of people killed in distraction-affected crashes rose to 3,331 in 2011 from 3,267 in 2010, an increase of 1.9 percent. I believe this increase can be attributed in part to increased awareness and reporting.
- Fatalities increased among large truck occupants by 20 percent. I want to assure the committee that we are working closely with my fellow administrator, Anne Ferro, and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration to gather more detailed information on the large truck occupant crashes to better understand the increase in fatalities in 2011.
- Bicycle and pedestrian fatalities increased by 8.7 percent and 3.0 percent respectively. This spike is alarming and we are taking a number of steps in addressing this. First, the department will be hosting two bike safety summits in the coming year. We will be working with advocates, safety experts, and average riders. We will examine what safety strategies work and what isn't working and we'll use this information to make bicycling safer throughout the Nation. We will target a series of events in the areas that have experienced the most fatalities and work with state and local officials to make sure they are taking advantage of the resources available to them. We challenge our State and local partners to help us better understand what is happening on the ground, for example, by trying to determine to what extent changes in bicycle fatalities might be related to

increased ridership. Finally, we will launch new demonstration programs to help improve driver and pedestrian behavior.

As you know, one of the most important things we can do to reduce roadway fatalities is to wear a seat belt. The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) included a seat belt incentive grant program to encourage states to enact and enforce primary belt use laws. Seat belt use continues to be higher in states that have primary belt laws, which permit law enforcement officers to issue citations to motorists solely for not using a seat belt rather than requiring additional traffic violations. I am pleased to report that the Section 406 Safety Belt Performance Grant program was a success, as 13 states received grants for enacting primary belt laws. Among the most dramatic increases in seat belt use were in the southern states, rising to 85 percent in 2012—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 to motorists solely for not using a seat belt rather than requiring additional traffic violations.

In spite of these changes, motor vehicle traffic crashes continue to be a leading cause of death in the younger age groups. In 2009, motor vehicle traffic crashes were the leading cause of death for age 4 and each age 11 through 27. That is why programs such as the Graduated Driver's License (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.

MAP-21 consolidated the various grant programs from SAFETEA-LU, including impaired driving and motorcycle grants, have been consolidated along with the new GDL and distracted driving grants, into a new Section 405 National Priority Safety program. This unified grant program provides the states a single, consolidated application and annual deadline, and greater flexibility to ensure grant funds are directed to priority highway safety programs.

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 as quickly as possible. Less than two months after enactment, we issued a Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) for the distracted driving grants. The deadline for the driver distraction grant applications was February 28, 2013 and I can report that 34 states, the District of Columbia, and three territories have submitted applications for grants. We are encouraged by the strong interest from the states and look forward to reviewing the grant applications.

Following closely on the distraction NOFA, we issued an interim final rule (IFR) for the national priority safety program grants. The IFR provides states guidance about the application procedures for all NHTSA highway safety grants. We published the IFR on January 23, 2013 and the comment period will remain open until April 23, 2013. In an effort to be as responsive to the states as possible, we have conducted several webinars with the state highway safety program offices to walk them step-by-step through the new grant programs and the consolidated application process. We have additional webinars scheduled for March. The deadline for the remaining Section 405 national priority safety programs is March 25, 2013. Starting in FY2014,

the deadline for all grants will be July 1. This will simplify the application process for states and allow for better highway safety planning and performance management.

Please be aware that the full year continuing resolution (CR) passed by the House last week would fail to provide funds for our agency in a manner consistent with MAP 21. Specifically, it would not provide funding for two new important MAP-21 grant programs—Distracted Driving and Graduated Driver’s Licenses for young drivers. The Senate’s version of the CR fully implements the MAP-21 authorization. We urge this Committee to work with the Congress and make sure that the resources for NHTSA can support the MAP-21 Priority Safety programs.

As an agency, we at NHTSA are dedicated to our mission of safety. To that end, we work closely with the states and assist them in achieving their respective highway safety goals. We will continue this partnership to ensure that MAP-21 is effectively implemented and we can continue to see improvements in highway safety and reductions in roadway fatalities.

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