

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF
COMMERCE

John T. Connor, Secretary

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Office of the Secretary
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REMARKS BY ALAN S. BOYD, UNDERSECRETARY OF COMMERCE FOR TRANSPORTATION
TO REPRESENTATIVES OF ASSOCIATIONS OF STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS
DECEMBER 6, 1966

I am pleased to meet with you today and to express on behalf of the Federal Government our appreciation for your interest and your participation in this meeting.

You are here because of the responsibilities you share for highway safety in your States and communities. It is the appalling reality of death and destruction on the highways of every State, every county, city and town, that has brought us together today to make common cause against a common enemy.

You are in the front line of this battle. It is the purpose of the National safety program, which you have been discussing today, to reinforce your efforts and to help you roll back the enemy.

I hope the dialogue we have begun today will be the prelude to a long, successful association which will produce increasingly safer highway travel for all our citizens.

We want to continue to give you all the information and assistance we can, and we hope you will continue to give us your thoughts and comments, because only through a mutual exchange can this program work effectively.

If we failed to give you all the answers you were seeking today, don't let this prevent you from moving ahead. You can begin implementing your own safety programs piece by piece as the National program develops, and I would strongly urge you to take this course.

Before we conclude this session I would like to offer a few general observations about the National highway safety program.

First, it should be perfectly clear that the highway safety program must be a cooperative effort if it is to succeed at all.

This theme is emphasized by the legislative history of the Highway Safety Act of 1966, which shows that President Johnson and Congress recognized that greater safety could best be achieved by extending responsibility to all who could contribute to this cause. Accordingly, the Act recognizes the responsibility of the Federal Government to give leadership and coordination to a national safety effort. It recognizes the primary and historic responsibility of the States and their subdivisions for the safe use of their roads and streets. And it recognizes the important role that the private sector must play in a truly effective safety program and anticipate important contributions by industry, universities and foundations and private associations.

The National Highway Safety program, then is not a Federal program but a national program, bringing together the many resources of all levels of government and of the private economy in a cooperative, comprehensive, balanced attack against one of the gravest threats to life and limb in the Twentieth Century.

It is significant that the Highway Safety Act had its genesis in Federal-aid highway legislation, and specifically in an amendment written last year by the House Public Works Committee. This Committee, as you know, is intimately familiar with the operation of the Federal-aid highway program, and with its long history as a model of Federal-State cooperation. It was out of this experience with highways that Congress and the Administration fashioned the Federal-aid safety program, and we want to see it also develop as a model of governmental cooperation.

This leads me to my second observation, that cooperation requires respect for diversity, for legitimate differences between regions, States and localities.

In setting uniform national standards we don't want any more than you, to require everyone to do everything the same way. We want to leave ample latitude for local initiative and adaptability as the most favorable climate for a creative and effective approach. Each State should tailor its program to its own make-up and character. It is in the best position to take account of its geography, its economy, its people, to identify its strengths and weaknesses, and frame its program accordingly.

At the same time we must keep in mind that the traffic accident problem is no respecter of political boundaries and that the ultimate goal of all our programs is to save people from death and injury - whether these people are natives of

our town or travelers from a distant State. NOTE:
Interstate Movement. What really matters is how well
we meet this objective, rather than how we go about it.

That is why the law calls for performance standards
for State programs. It does not say, for instance, that
the Federal Government should set a uniform national
speed limit. Obviously, the conditions that determine
the safe speed on the Boston Post Road are not the same
as those prevailing on Interstate 40 in Arizona. What
the law requires is that performance standards be
established through which State regulations will promote
safe driving under the conditions confronting the driver
in each State.

My third point, and a most challenging one to the
States and local communities, is that the purpose of the
Highway Safety Act is to promote the development of new
countermeasures against accidents and their end results.
In authorizing Federal-aid funds, Congress specifically
intended that this money be used to initiate new action,
and not simply to share in the cost of existing programs.

These funds have been referred to as "start-up" or
"seed" money. As you are fully, and perhaps painfully,
aware the Federal funds are not intended to cover all the
costs of the expanded effort, and we appreciate the
financial burdens the States are being called upon to

accept. The Federal funds, however, are a start in the right direction and will help improve both the quality and quantity of the States' response to the traffic accident problem. And, as you know, we are to report to Congress in 1968 with our recommendations for the continued financing of State and local programs.

These three points - - the cooperative effort, local adaptability and initiative within national performance standards, and the accent on new programs - - all tend to focus on my final observation. In the words of the poet, "A man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?"

I earnestly hope that as all of us go about the task of putting this safety program into action our reach will exceed our grasp. To bring that thought right down to earth, no matter how well we are doing today, we must do better, and we must do better in every area of traffic safety. We must in fact, set our goals beyond our reach.

To be blunt, the legislation enacted by Congress, after months of careful study and deliberation, certainly cannot be regarded as a vote of confidence in existing safety activities.

We need to take a critical look at all those activities and find out what must be done to strengthen them - not how we can get by with the least sacrifice, inconvenience, or disruption of the status quo.

We must be ready to innovate, to accept scientifically-based information and adapt it rapidly to existing or new programs.

We will, of course, continue working in many of the areas, we are today - in driver education, licensing, vehicle inspection, policing, traffic control, highway improvement, emergency services - to name some. The real test will be how well we are doing in these areas.

As the program develops over the next few years we ought to be able to evaluate the various activities better than we are able to now. We should be able to check their effectiveness - to spot promising innovations, to exchange information on productive techniques and methods, as you develop them.

This is your opportunity and your challenge. This is where all our efforts merge, because the real thrust of the cooperative national highway safety program is to produce the best results for the resources devoted to it.

Let us aim to get the most out of every safety activity. This is what the American people are asking for us - this is the least we should ask of ourselves!