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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF

COMMERCE

John T. Connor, Secretary

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REMARKS BY ALAN S. BOYD, UNDER SECRETARY OF COMMERCE FOR TRANSPORTATION, PREPARED FOR DELIVERY AT THE ANNUAL PRESENTATION OF THE ALFRED P. SLOAN RADIO-TV AWARDS FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY, AT THE WALDORF-ASTORIA HOTEL, NEW YORK CITY, 7 P M., TUESDAY, MAY 24, 1966

There is a normal human tendency to be self-satisfied: to feel that what we are doing now and the way in which we conduct our affairs is good and sufficient. It is often uncomfortable to consider that we can and should improve our activities. But we can step out of our humdrum routine to promote, to inspire, and to educate. Those whom we honor tonight have done this by utilizing the communications media with sensitivity and imagination to promote Highway Safety.

In winning the Alfred P. Sloan Awards you have demonstrated your ability to live up to Mr. Sloan's own high ideals of public responsibility. This sense of responsibility was reflected in his life-long commitment to the cause of highway safety, and the personal leadership he gave to this cause.

Thirty years ago he joined with three other industry leaders in organizing the Automotive Safety Foundation, which he continued to support even after his retirement as an active executive of General Motors Corporation. In 1948, as founder and chairman of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, he established these awards to the broadcasting industry, and he continued to participate personally in this program so long as his health permitted.

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It is good to take occasion periodically to recognize the efforts spent on traffic safety because those who are devoting their energies to this cause may be tempted to feel that they have been rowing upstream and against a strong current, at that. Tonight's ceremony affords a brief pause to look around and see where we have been and where we are going. I can't leave this simile, however, without urging you not to rest too long on your oars.

We have made considerable progress in this long, upstream struggle. Travel on the Nation's roads and streets is almost three times as safe as when the Automotive Safety Foundation was founded -- as measured in deaths per vehicle miles.

But it still is far from safe enough. The closer we get to shore, if you will, the stronger the current -- because of the enormous growth in population, in drivers, vehicles, and highway usage. The absolute toll in lives lost, injuries, accidents and damages now reaches new records each year.

The figures are familiar and frightening: Fifty thousand Americans killed in a year; 100,000 permanently disabled; nearly 4 million injured; over \$10 billion in economic losses.

You know, and I believe more and more American citizens know, that this national tragedy need not continue. They agree with President Johnson that "we can no longer tolerate such anarchy on wheels."

Earlier this year President Johnson presented a program designed to carry forward a comprehensive, accelerated attack on traffic accidents. Congress now is preparing to make decisions about this program which I am confident will launch a new era in safer highway travel for the American people -- provided the program receives the strong and continuing support it must have to be most effective.

First, let me make it as clear as I can that the Administration's approach is positive, not negative.

The Administration has not sought to create scapegoats. It has no script for "good guys" and "bad guys." It has not thought in terms of accusing or punishing anyone.

It has, instead, thought in terms of how accidents, injuries, and deaths can be reduced. We in the Administration are not interested in legislation for the sake of legislation. We are not concerned with organizing elaborate programs for their own sake -- or for their propaganda value.

In three words: We want results.

Last April 22 in making an appeal for enactment of the Administration's highway safety bill, President Johnson said:

"The American people are aroused. They want action. We want action, too, but we want it to be fair and intelligent -- for the American driver and the great industry that provides his car."

That sums up our goal: to obtain tangible improvements in highway safety, with fairness and intelligence.

This objective has been the guideline in formulating the Administration's proposals. I believe an examination of those proposals will bear me out.

These proposals do not anticipate any easy cure, just as they do not single out any particular villain. They do not prejudge any facet of the safety issue. Rather, they offer a program designed to take full advantage of the progress made to date, and to force the pace in discovering and implementing new knowledge and new techniques that will yield substantial, provable benefits.

The public discussion and debate of the past few months, while they have stimulated a desirable public interest in traffic safety, have tended to center attention on one or two elements of the problem. The Administration's program, on the other hand, considers all aspects.

The scope and direction of the Administration's program has been emphasized repeatedly by Secretary Connor in his appearances before Congressional Committees. I would like to quote from his testimony:

"The program that would be provided by this legislation would devote the needed emphasis and resources to all aspects of the highway safety problem. It is based on the recognition that accidents often are caused by multiple factors -- they are frequently the result of some failure of the system which includes the driver, his vehicle, and his environment, including the highway, or the interaction of all three. It does not assume that any one of these elements is more important than the others, and it is not directed toward a panacea-type solution to the highway safety problem.

"The approach of this legislation, besides being directed toward all elements of the traffic safety problem, would include the participation of all levels of the Government -- Federal State, and local -- as well as industry and private organizations."

I might add that the legislation was drafted intentionally to be flexible with regard to program, organization and administration, so as to facilitate the full use of existing knowledge and the results of research and development as they become available and as their usefulness is proven.

Specifically, the Administration proposes a broad Federal research and development program in highway safety. The Administration also seeks ^{directive} ~~discretionary~~ authority to set safety performance standards for automotive vehicles and their components. And the Administration is seeking \$420 million over a six year period to assist the States in developing and improving their own comprehensive traffic safety programs under uniform national standards.

The latter provision recognizes the traditional responsibilities of State and local governments with regard to control of the traffic system.

The Federal Government's responsibility to provide leadership and coordination for these State programs was clearly established by Congress last year, in an amendment to Federal-aid highway legislation. Now, the Administration is seeking Federal funds to assist the States in carrying out the objectives of this amendment.

This approach is in keeping with the spirit of Federal-State cooperation which has worked so successfully in the Federal-aid highway program. Through this program the Federal Government has made and is making an enormous contribution to highway safety. It is enabling the States to construct the Interstate Highway System, whose controlled-access freeways are the safest roads yet built. It is assisting the States in their long-range improvement programs for major highways. And now it is aiding them in a priority program for eliminating the danger traps that still remain on Federal-aid highways.

The Federal-aid program, is providing substantial benefits in safety, as well as in faster, more economical, and more comfortable travel.

Still, highways are only one element of the traffic safety problem. The legislation now on the books, as a result of last year's amendment, plus the financial aid requested by the Administration, would permit the development of a comprehensive program, with no aspect excluded.

It would permit a program directed toward the total highway transportation system, and its three basic elements: the driver, his vehicle, and the highway. The States would continue to assume primary responsibility for control of the driver and the highway, but the Federal government would take a portion of the States' responsibility for the vehicle, to the extent that it would assure that new vehicles met minimum safety performance standards. This new role for the Federal Government recognizes the desirability for uniform national standards for manufacturers, rather than separate State standards.

In addition, under its authority to set uniform standards for other areas of State traffic safety programs, the Federal Government could identify the major gaps and weaknesses that exist throughout the country today, and proceed in cooperation with the States to upgrade current programs and formulate new ones as needed.

The goal of the program I just outlined is to get tangible improvements in highway safety with fairness and intelligence. The key to how this program must proceed to get results lies in the concept that accidents and their consequences result from failures of the system which includes the driver, the vehicle, the highway, and their interaction.

While this concept is simple enough to state, its implications are not widely understood. It requires the rather belated application to highway transportation of what is known in engineering as the "systems approach."

The main obstacle to the most effective use of systems engineering in the past has been the practice of assigning a "primary" cause in accidents -- and particularly of blaming most accidents on "driver error." In this way of thinking any accident that a driver may conceivably have averted is ipso facto his fault. The way to prevent accidents, then, is to make all drivers perform at all times without error.

Systems engineering, on the other hand, recognizes that accidents can result from multiple causes, in the sense that a cause is any condition existing prior to the accident which it might have been possible or practicable to eliminate, and but for which the accident would have been avoided. In this view, all accident causes are equal if, by the elimination of any one of them, the accident might have been prevented.

Rather than accepting driver error as the "primary" cause of most accidents, systems engineering seeks ways to change the elements of the highway transportation system so that accidents will not occur, or so that their severity will be reduced.

For a simple parallel we can take an illustration from industry. A worker could be trained to operate a dangerous power machine and signs could be posted warning him to work safely. Then if he gets careless just once and maims himself, it is presumably his own fault. On the other hand, the machine could be designed with a protective guard which would make it impossible for him to get hurt.

In highway transportation, the effectiveness of the systems approach has been demonstrated quite clearly by the Interstate Highway System. These controlled-access freeways are consciously designed to prevent many types of traffic conflict and to make driving easier and safer.

They provide separate roadways for opposing traffic with wide medians, or median barriers, to prevent head-on collisions. They have no intersections, or cross traffic at grade, thus preventing angle collisions. They have gentle curves and grades and long sight distance. They have wide, paved shoulders and clear roadsides.

On the best of our highways, if a driver loses control of his car for whatever reason -- whether he was swatting a bee, lifting his pet dog off the floor, falling asleep, or if he had a "couple of beers" -- if he goes off the road, he has a chance to regain control without slamming into a tree, or rolling into a ditch. What could have been a needless fatality becomes simply an incident.

Or take a case where the vehicle is at fault. If the brakes fail, the driver has a better chance to ride out safely on the Interstate, because there are no intersections, or driveways, or cross traffic, or sharp curves, and there are wide shoulders where he can get out of the traffic stream.

Because safety has been engineered into the Interstate System, the same drivers have only a half or a third as many accidents on the Interstate as they do on conventional highways. This year alone, the Interstate Highways now open to traffic will save the lives of at least 4,000 persons who would be killed if they were forced to use conventional roads.

It is apparent, then, that if we try to understand drivers as they are -- with their capabilities and their limitations -- we can design highways and vehicles that make their driving more reliable and more effective.

We need to recognize that driving today is a complicated task, that it occasionally requires drivers to make decisions and to act with speed or precision that is beyond their abilities. We can help them by reducing the difficulty of the driving task or by giving them better tools to cope with it.

System engineering is the way to this objective. It can be effective both in preventing accidents and in reducing the severity of those that do occur. At the present time, for example, highway engineers are experimenting with break-away sign supports for those obstacles that must remain near the pavement. Research also is underway in the Bureau of Public Roads to develop electronic or mechanical aids for the driver, which could, for instance, inform him when it is safe to pass on a two-lane rural highway, or when he is closing too fast on the car ahead.

The systems approach also looks to changes in the vehicle that will make driving more reliable, or that will prevent or reduce injury and death when accidents happen. And it looks to the interaction of the vehicle and the highway, and to reducing the adverse effects of the environment, particularly of hazardous weather conditions.

By approaching highway safety as primarily a technological problem -- and only secondarily as a social or legal one -- and by attempting to reduce the demands on the driver, we encounter some raised eyebrows from those accustomed to thinking of accidents in terms of driver error. It has been suggested, for instance, that this approach is somehow immoral, that it relieves drivers of responsibility for misconduct, that it excuses them instead of punishing them.

I do not agree. It is no more immoral than shaving with a safety razor instead of a straight edge.

It does say that the man who makes a mistake, where it is an honest one or pure negligence, need not suffer instantaneous corporal, if not capital, punishment. And that innocent passengers and drivers of other cars need not suffer with him. The drunken, reckless, or irresponsible driver can be brought to justice through due process of law.

Furthermore, the people we are trying to protect are not, by and large, habitually dangerous drivers. They are not the "suicidal boobs" that self-styled experts like to preach against. Nor are they imaginary. They are, in fact, you and I.

The truth is that the great bulk of accidents involve average, normally responsible drivers. This was borne out quite clearly in an analysis by the Bureau of Public Roads last summer of 150,000 California drivers' records. The study showed that almost an entirely different group of drivers is involved in accidents each year. Removing the repeaters -- those who have two or more accidents in one year -- would have little or no effect on the following year's accidents.

So, our annual traffic toll is, to an overwhelming degree, an accumulation of rare accidents, occurring to all too many generally good drivers. It is plain, then, that if accidents are to be radically reduced, all drivers -- not just the "dangerous" few -- must be helped.

This is precisely what President Johnson's traffic safety program is meant to do.

Relating this view of driver error or driver responsibility more specifically to the safety efforts we are honoring tonight, I would guess -- and this is an undocumented guess -- that most of the traffic safety efforts of radio and TV stations in past years would come under the heading of "driver motivation" or "driver improvement". No one, of course, would deny that there is room for improvement in the general level of driver competence. For that matter, I suppose each of us here could stand to improve his own skill behind the wheel. But while driver improvement is a worthy cause, it must be supplemented by engineering more safety into the highway transportation system.

For this reason, I would urge broadcasters to support safety programs at all levels of government. And I would urge you to review your public service safety efforts, remembering that our objective in mass communications as well as in our operational programs should be to help rather than harass the driver.

I believe President Johnson's proposals provide the means to make such programs a reality. I think they are the basis for an effective safety program that will get results for the American people.