

Chapter 3: Maintaining the Focus

Series: FHWA Highway History Website Articles

March 20, 2024



U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590

The original format of this document was an active HTML page(s) located under <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/history.cfm>. The Federal Highway Administration converted the HTML page(s) into an Adobe® Acrobat® PDF file to preserve and support reuse of the information it contained.

The intellectual content of this PDF is an authentic capture of the original HTML file. Hyperlinks and other functions of the HTML webpage may have been lost, and this version of the content may not fully work with screen reading software.

Search

[Home](#) / [President Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Federal Role in Highway Safety](#)

Highway History

Interstate System >

Federal-Aid Legislation

History of FHWA

General Highway History

FHWA By Day

Chapter 3: Maintaining The Focus

Gimmicks and Panaceas

In 1956, some consideration was given to holding a third S-D Day. The Traffic and Transportation Conference of the National Safety Council, meeting in February in Cincinnati, Ohio, voted to make the month of December a period of special emphasis. This vote was based on the conclusion that S-D Day 1956 had a favorable effect. During the emphasis period, S-D Day reversed the unfavorable trend of the previous 8 months, while accidents increased sharply immediately for the remainder of December.

Other organizations, while offering varying suggestions on the duration, supported another S-D Day: the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the American Automobile Association, the American Manufacturers Association, the Association of Casualty and Surety Companies, the National Association of Automotive Mutual Insurance Companies, the American Transit Association, and the U.S. Navy.

The Advisory Council of the President's Committee for Traffic Safety thought that S-D Day should be postponed until spring 1957. The Advisory Council also planned to consider converting the idea to a month-long safety-emphasis campaign. According to the Advisory Council's report on its discussion:

The postponement was decided upon to permit more study by a committee of the Council as to how a special emphasis program, such as 'S-D Day,' can best be related to the basic purpose of the President's Committee. That purpose is to encourage the formation and strengthening of State and local citizen safety organizations working to apply the known techniques of traffic safety set forth in the Action Program.

Toward this end the Advisory Council wants to be satisfied that the program falls within a period of the year when the maximum number of people will be most likely to read and heed the traffic safety messages brought to them by the various media of public information.

In the end, S-D Day 1955 would be the final S-D Day. Executive Secretary Bethea of the President's Committee for Traffic Safety, discussed S-D Day with reporter Don Ross for a 1961 series of articles on highway safety in the *New York Herald-Tribune*. Bethea said:

This is a great field for gimmicks and panaceas. The President's Committee even had its own gimmick back in 1954 and 1955 when we promoted Safe Driving Day with a lot of razzmatazz. We tried to encourage every community in the nation to go without a traffic death or even an accident for just one day.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Federal Role in Highway Safety

Preface

Introduction

Chapter 1: President Harry S. Truman's Highway Safety Conferences

Chapter 2: A Crusade for Safety

Chapter 3: Maintaining The Focus

Chapter 4: The Federal Role in Highway Safety

Epilogue: The Changing Federal Role

Appendix

Ross noted that, "The results of the two S. D. Days in terms of deaths and accidents, were not encouraging." He explained that the President's committee dropped S-D Day "because it feared, among other things, that the ballyhoo attendant upon it was diverting attention from the balanced program for traffic safety that, in the opinion of traffic specialists, offers the best hope of reducing accidents." Bethea added:

I believe the President's Committee is a lot more sophisticated now than it was back in those days. Now we spend much of our time trying to convince public officials, legislators and policemen that there are no panaceas.

As Dr. Paul V. Joliet, Chief of the Accident Prevention Program of the U.S. Public Health Service, told Ross, "There are no simple, easy solutions."

Back the Attack!

When the National Safety Council held its 44th annual National Safety Congress at the Conrad Hilton Hotel on October 22-26, 1956, in Chicago, Chairman Dearborn had to confirm what the delegates knew:

I do not need to remind anyone in this room that at this moment the war we are waging on accidents is not going the way we want it to go. The ugly fact is that we have lost ground in this war during the last year-or, as a matter of fact, during the last 18 months. We have suffered reverses that we cannot realistically ignore or minimize.

This is especially true in the field of traffic accidents, where the steady improvements we were making until 18 months ago have yielded to a persistent rise, month after month, in the highway death toll. As we meet here today we face the tragic fact that unless we suddenly hit upon a plan of attack more effective than any we have devised up to this moment, the traffic death toll this year will reach an all-time high in the history of our nation-a dreadful figure of more than 41,000 deaths, and possibly even 42,000!

What was worse, he did not need a "crystal ball" to see the future. His statisticians told him that by 1966 the country would have 80 million vehicles-and 54,000 deaths on the highway. And by 1975, when the total number of vehicles would reach 104 million, "dare we even guess?"

He was encouraged by "an ever-swelling tide of public education" and an increasingly "receptive public." Plans, he said, were underway for "new and even more effective safety propaganda" to reach the public through every medium:

Even now, we are about to launch a hard-hitting, continuing traffic safety program to be known as *Back the Attack*, which we believe will provide the most comprehensive and effective means yet devised of obtaining united and sustained action by public officials and by citizens against traffic accidents.

The campaign was formally called "Back the Attack on Traffic Accidents!" The campaign grew out of a workshop of the Council's Traffic and Transportation Conference in February 1956. Participants had the result of the Council's study of 501 fatal accidents, in which 564 people died, during Christmas weekend in 1955. The main factors in traffic accidents had been excessive speed, drinking, darkness and pedestrian errors. The workshop recommended a month-long

emphasis on these factors in December. A followup conference in June recommended kicking off the campaign in December, but continuing it in accelerated form through 1957 based on three cornerstones:

1. Back the Attack-for Citizen Support-Individual and Group
2. Step-up the Attack-for Official Action
3. Join the Attack-for Promoting Participation in Community Safety Organizations.

Therefore, Back the Attack on Traffic Accidents! was designed to achieve a balanced traffic control and accident prevention program.

Dearborn, having begun with a pessimistic look at the future, ended with a positive vision. The day was near, he said, when "the very size of the traffic toll will be a powerful influence in shocking the American people into drastic action." He saw an "aroused citizenry" demanding action. He saw them insisting on better and safer highways. He saw "developments in engineering design that will make these new highways so danger-proof that only the most willful driver can make them dangerous."

His vision included the President's Committee for Traffic Safety:

I see the activities generated by the President's Committee for Traffic Safety and by the National Safety Council's field service staff spreading through the nation, state by state and city by city. I see the interest and enthusiasm inspired by the four regional conferences held under the direction of the President's Committee bring about more and more organized safety effort on the state and local level where it is so badly needed.

Concluding his vision, Dearborn concluded:

Let each and every one of us leave this great National Safety Congress and go back to his home and his job with a firm and unshakeable resolve to make 1957 the year that the war on accidents takes a turn for the better and heads for victory.

America has never lost a fight. With new spirit, new fervor, new confidence and hope and faith, *and with God's help, it will not lose this one!*

During the preceding months, the Council had lined up the support of organizations around the country for Back the Attack on Accidents! President Eisenhower endorsed the program on September 17, 1956:

For eighteen months, American traffic fatalities have been increasing. If this trend continues through the rest of the year, we shall have the highest motor vehicle death toll in history.

It is shockingly clear that each of us must assume personal responsibility, not only for driving and walking safely, but for supporting our state and local public officials as they seek to enforce and strengthen our safety programs.

The Traffic and Transportation Conference has come forward at a critical time with its year-round program to "BACK THE ATTACK ON TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS".

I hope all our citizens will take part in this program.

The President's Committee for Traffic Safety backed the campaign, in part by preparing films to publicize the Action Program. Eight films were prepared in cooperation with the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and the Automotive Safety Foundation:

1. "Alias the Killer"-The kickoff film showed how a community can organize for highway safety. (13 minutes)
2. "Uniform Traffic Laws"-Tells why highway laws should be written so drivers and pedestrians can understand, and obey, them. (5 minutes)
3. "As a Matter of Fact"-Discusses accident investigation and the importance of establishing record bureaus. (5 minutes)
4. "Teach Them Traffic Safety"-About teaching traffic safety and driver education in school. (6 minutes)
5. "Traffic Court, U.S.A."-Describes the need to modernize traffic courts and eliminate "cracker barrel justice." (7 minutes).
6. "Traffic Police"-Calls for trained officers, special police divisions, selective enforcement, and a high rate of convictions and penalties. (6 minutes)
7. "Motor Vehicle Administration"-Recommends strong State motor vehicle departments. (6 minutes)
8. "Engineering for Traffic Safety"-Highlights the three-fold job of traffic engineering, namely safety in streets and highways, in traffic operations, and vehicles. (6 minutes)

In addition, the Committee circulated a letter in November to all delegates to the President's Regional Conferences on Highway Safety asking them to support Back the Attack on Traffic Accidents!

When the results were in, 1956 was the deadliest year to date, up 4 percent from 1955. In all, Miller estimated that 40,000 people died on the Nation's highways, slightly more than the 39,969 who died in 1941. His summary in *Public Safety*, March 1957, explained:

A new record high in traffic deaths for 1956 was almost a certainty until late in the year. Deaths increased steadily until October when a sharp drop (12 per cent) occurred. But the month that turned the tide was December, normally the most hazardous of the year.

December deaths totaled about 4,000, unchanged from December 1955. This checking of the upward trend-coinciding with the opening of the National Safety Council's *Back the Attack on Traffic Accidents* campaign-brought the 1956 total so close to the 1941 record toll that the question cannot be decided until the final figures are tabulated.

The fatality rate was 6.4 per 100 million vehicle miles, the same as in 1955. The magazine illustrated the importance of the drop in fatality rate since 1937, when 39,643 people died on the roads, by pointing out that if the 1937 fatality rate of 14.7 had occurred in 1956, 92,600 people would have died:

It has been said "you don't kill rates, you kill people," but the whittling process that brought the death rate to 6.4 has certainly meant the saving of thousands of lives, the elimination of millions of injuries.

(As final figures came in later in the year, Miller reported that the total for 1956 had been 39,628, below 1941 and 1937.)

The National Safety Council saw the new Interstate System as one of the key factors in maintaining the 1956 downward trend in 1957. On January 4, 1957, the Council sent a letter to its chapters, affiliated councils, and other safety organizations:

Modernization of the Nation's roadway system as provided in the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 is an important step in meeting the emergency of highway traffic facilitation and traffic safety.

By internal and marginal controls built into the roadway, particularly the control of access to and from adjoining property, coupled with adequate police supervision, accidents and deaths resulting from driver errors can be materially reduced Compared with older type roads, limited access produces a reduction of from 65 to 75 per cent in traffic deaths.

The National Safety Council supports the need for a modern interstate roadway system of limited access highways, and we recommend that state and local citizen safety organizations take a similar position to *Back the Attack* within their states.

Where the limited access feature was being opposed by economic interests or the State was having difficulty providing its 10 percent share of construction costs for the Interstate System, the Council urged its members to help build "strong citizen support" and provide "tangible proof of support" to State legislatures so that safety gains "may be realized."

Safety Features, 1957

The January and February 1957 issues of *Public Safety* contained a two-part article on "Safety Features of 1957 Cars" introduced in September 1956. The introductory paragraph stated that:

The 1957 cars reflect the attitude of automotive pioneers, show features tending to minimize the seriousness of injury if an accident occurs. Grateful as we all are for these advances, we must not forget that any substantial improvement in the motor vehicle accident problem rests with the individual-the driver as well as the pedestrian.

General Motors Corporation: The new models included steering wheels with recessed hubs and redesigned instrument panels with recessed knobs and gauges. The Chevrolet's Turboglide transmission included a hill retarder to aid braking on down grades. The Buick included padded horizontal rolls at the top and bottom of the instrument panel. A "safety minder" was optional-it would buzz when the car exceeded a predetermined speed set by the driver. The Cadillac included rubber tips on the bumper guards, soft rubber nosing on the top edge of all back seats, and increased visibility via the rearward slant of the windshield pillar post. The Oldsmobile underwent major changes. It was wider and heavier with improved front and rear suspension featuring "counter-dive" to prevent the front from nosing down upon braking. The safety pad on the dash panel was deepened. For the Pontiac, *Public Safety* reported, illustrated the "accent that has been put on safety" by GM. The windshield had been redesigned to increase visibility while the "instrument cluster, with two circular dials and a luminescent 'Safety Line' speedometer, are located at an easily readable level." The 1957 models featured a hooded outside rear-view mirror with a remote control, non-glare tilting inside rear-view mirror, a no-glare textured paint for the top of the instrument panel, and a "prismatic traffic signal light viewer mounted on the instrument panel." A "Morrokide covered safety pad" was optional for the instrument panel on all models except those with air conditioning.

Ford Motor Company: According to *Public Safety*, "Success and public acceptance of the five safety features offered by Ford last year" prompted the company to increase the emphasis on safety. Success could be measured by how many customers ordered the two optional features (crash padding and seat belts) in the 1956 models: "No optional feature in Ford history caught on so fast in the first year." The five features of the Life Guard Design were being supplemented in the Ford with recessed knobs on the instrument panel, stronger door locks, more resilient instrument and visor padding, and a stronger, wider frame that "places extra steel between occupants and a sideswiping car." In addition, wide-flaring frame design provided side rails around the passenger section while roofs had been strengthened. The hood was hinged so it would not flip open accidentally; the hood latch was on the instrument panel. The 1957 Ford had less tendency for front-end dives on quick stops or rear-end dips on rapid starts. The luxury Continental Mark II featured the Ford safety package plus modified power steering control springs to reduce steering effort and eliminate "wheel fight" from rotational shock. The nylon seat belts were bolted to body and frame. The Lincoln included power brakes as standard equipment. The Quadra-Lites (four road lights in vertical pairs) were housed in oval-shaped, chrome-rimmed settings. The Mercury "has really come up with a list of safety firsts." It had a lower center of gravity to increase stability, improved door locks, specially designed rivets on the seat track to keep the seats from leaving the tracks during a collision, an improved spray pattern for the windshield washer, redesigned brakes, a reflector in the rear bumper pod, new easy-open seat belt buckles, and a zippered children's safety jacket to keep children from being thrown off balance in sudden stops. The new Mercury Turnpike Cruisers included a variety of safety features, including a special safety steering wheel with a flat top sector to permit the driver to have an unobstructed view of the road and a power-retractable rear window with roof-level, fresh air intakes ("a new approach to car ventilation").

Chrysler Corporation: Chrysler cars (Chrysler, DeSoto, Dodge, Imperial, and Plymouth) included total contact center-plane brakes, energy absorbing steering wheels, padded instrument panels, rear view mirrors that provided unobstructed forward vision and fold out of the way upon impact, recessed outside door handles, padded sun visors, seat belts with simplified installation, safety door latches, and electrically-driven windshield wipers.

American Motors Corporation: George Romney, American's President, welcomed the renewed interest in safety. Citing the seat belts in the 1949 Nash, he pointed out that some innovations do better "on a second try." The Hudson included single unit body construction; the rigid, integrated unit provided greater safety. Padded instrument panels were standard on all models while the new padded sun visors were standard on custom models and optional on super models. Single unit body construction was included in the redesigned Metropolitan 1500 along with such standard equipment as directional signals, electric windshield wipers, and sun visors. The "airscoop" on the hood had been eliminated to increase visibility. The Nash featured a four headlight system, safety door locks, padded instrument panels and sun visors, and unitized body construction. Similar features were included in the Rambler, which also included strengthened hardtops and additional thickness in the center sub-pillar that ended at the top of the doors. The underbody and side adjacent to the pillar had been reinforced.

A Worthwhile Objective

On January 18, 1957, President Eisenhower met with the Advisory Council of the President's Committee for Traffic Safety in the White House. Harlow Curtice, who referred to the traffic record in 1956 as

"the worst record in our history," gave the President a report on the Committee's three major projects:



First, we wholeheartedly endorse the proposal of the Advisory Council that we sponsor a national meeting at which public officials concerned with traffic safety will review and evaluate state and local programs. Such a meeting appears to be unquestionably desirable and it is heartening to know that groups representing public officials were largely instrumental in advancing the program.

President Eisenhower talks to Harlow H. Curtice (seated on right), Chairman of the President's Committee for Highway Safety. Other members include newspaper executive William Randolph Hearst, Jr., (back row, second from right) and the only woman on the Committee, Mrs. Raymond Sayre of Iowa.

Secondly, the Committee concurred in your (Advisory Council) recommendation that another series of regional public support conferences be sponsored in 1958. The benefit of last year's meetings and the obvious need for an effective follow-up make such action highly desirable.

We also reviewed with great interest your progress in developing recommendations for mobilizing safety-minded civic groups to support the new national highway program. Such a project can contribute greatly to the achievement of our traffic safety objective-and will also help assure the many other benefits of an adequate highway system The President has enthusiastically endorsed the Committee's proposal to undertake this project.

In addition, Curtice gave the President a copy of the report of the Governor's Conference Special Committee on Highway Safety. The Governor's committee, headed by Governor Abraham Ribicoff of Connecticut, covered many topics, including the need for each Governor to strengthen every element of the attack on traffic accidents, establish a committee to appraise the highway safety problem, and review the traffic inventories, such as the traffic safety inventory administered by the National Safety Council.

Following the meeting, President Eisenhower issued a statement:

The death of more than 40 thousand Americans in traffic accidents during 1956 is a shocking record. The tragedy is that most of the accidents could have been prevented. I want to thank your Committee and through you all of the fine organizations which are cooperating in the uphill fight to prevent a repetition of this grim statistic in 1957.

I am hopeful that the traffic safety report formulated by the Governors' Conference will result in prompt and uniform action by state and local governments to curb irresponsible driving. But while the basic authority for traffic control rests with state and local officials, the responsibility for behaving sensibly in traffic is shared by all of us. I hope that every organized group in every walk of life in America realizes it can help promote safety on our roads and streets and stop the wanton killing. There is no more worthwhile objective.

In support of this objective, the President's Committee for Traffic Safety announced plans for six regional traffic-safety seminars for officers of parents' and women's organizations. The seminars grew out of ideas expressed during the regional conferences held the previous spring. They would be conducted by the Traffic Institute of Northwestern University to provide training in the Action Program, with particular attention to how citizen organizations can help put the program into effect in their community. As Admiral Miller explained:

Traffic safety is everybody's business. And the only way we can reduce the high rate of fatalities and accidents on our streets and highways is to have the full, active cooperation and support of all civic groups.

The first seminar would be held for western States at the University of California, Berkeley, on January 29-31, 1957. The southeastern seminar, the final one in the series, would be held at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville on December 16-18.

President Eisenhower on Federal-State Relations

Traffic safety was still on the President's mind when he addressed the annual meeting of the Governor's Conference on the evening of June 24, 1957, at Williamsburg, Virginia. His primary theme was the balance of power between the Federal and State governments. He said that the Federal Government had "siphoned away State authority," which could not have happened "without the neglect, acquiescence, or unthinking cooperation of the States themselves." He recalled that one of his earliest actions after taking office had been to establish a Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, which had "pointed the way to improvements in areas of mutual concern to the States and the Federal Government." He hastened to add:

Opposed though I am to needless Federal expansion, since 1953 I have found it necessary to urge Federal action in some areas traditionally reserved to the States.

He cited several examples, including classroom shortages, slum clearance and urban renewal, and traffic safety. After commenting on the other examples, he said:

As for traffic safety, this, happily, is still a State and local responsibility. But day by day the American people are paying an increasingly fearful price for the failure of the States to agree on such safety essentials as standards for licensing of drivers and vehicles and basic rules of the road.

The need could scarcely be more acute. Last year's toll of traffic dead soared beyond 40 thousand persons. One and a half million citizens were injured. Many were disabled for life. The estimated cost to the country was 4 billion 750 million dollars.

We simply cannot let this go on. The cost of inaction is prohibitive. Who is going to fill the vacuum? Someone must, and someone will. Are we willing that, once again, it be Washington, D.C.?

I believe deeply in States' rights. I believe that the preservation of our States as vigorous, powerful governmental units is essential to permanent individual freedom and the growth of our national strength. But it is idle to champion States' rights without upholding States' responsibilities as well.

Returning to the general subject of Federal-State relations, the President proposed an "objective reappraisal and reallocation of those responsibilities" that are best left to the States. He warned that unless the States act, they will create "new vacuums into which the Federal Government will plunge ever more deeply, impelled by popular pressures and transient political expediencies." The Governor's Conference adopted a resolution accepting the President's suggestion.

He followed up his call for a renewed look at Federal-State relations by appointing seven government officials to a Joint Federal-State Action Committee on July 20. The Federal members were:

Robert B. Anderson, Chairman, Secretary of the Treasury,
James P. Mitchell, Secretary of Labor,
Marion B. Folsom, Secretary of Health, Education, and
Welfare,
Percival F. Brundage, Director, Bureau of the Budget,
Meyer Kestnbaum, Special Assistant to the President,
John S. Bragdon, Special Assistant to the President,
Howard Pyle, Special Assistant to the President for
Intergovernmental Affairs

The speech and proposed review by the Joint Federal-State Action Committee reflected the President's bedrock views. In designating the Federal members, he recalled his speech to the Governors' Conference:

I suggested that the Committee should, in designating the functions to be reassumed by the States, also specify when those functions should be assumed, the amounts by which Federal taxes should be reduced, and increases in State revenues needed to support the transferred functions. I added that the Committee might, as the first step, concentrate on a single function or program and pair it with a specific Federal tax or tax amount.

He added that he hoped the Joint Federal-State Action Committee "will result in less centralized and thereby more responsive and efficient government for the American people."

These sentiments reflected his views whenever the subject of Federal-State relations came up, but virtually from the start of his Administration, he had made an exception for highways. He was convinced that the Federal Government had a responsibility for mobilizing State and local officials, as well as the public, in the crusade for better highways, and he acted on that conviction.

Backing the Attack!

During the 13th General Assembly of State Governments, held in early December at the Edgewater Beach Hotel, Chicago, safety officials lined up support for the extended Back the Attack on Traffic Accidents!

As Chairman of the Governors' Conference Highway Safety Committee, Governor Ribicoff explained the program to participants. He called the traffic toll "a national emergency that cries out for immediate action on a nationwide basis." He told them that the Governors had launched an "unprecedented crusade to reduce this needless, shameful loss of life." He said:

The Highway Safety Committee of the Governors' Conference, after exhaustive study and conferences with the ranking highway safety specialists, has prepared a report of recommendations. These recommendations have been sent to every governor in the country and are intended to serve as a guide in reducing the carnage on his highways.

The recommendations, like the Action Program, covered such areas as uniformity in traffic laws, reciprocity among States, driver education and improvement, licensing, suspension and revocation procedures, improved enforcement, impartial courts, research, and the enlisting of public support. Governor Ribicoff emphasized that "all three branches of our coordinating system of government-the Executive, the Legislative and the Judiciary-have vital parts to play in achieving highway safety."

Before these recommendations could be adopted, he said, "a State must know what its highway safety program is." The Committee called on every Governor to appraise the State's highway safety needs. An existing agency or a special citizens' committee could undertake the study, but if a citizens' committee were established, Governor Ribicoff recommended that it "should be representative of a cross section of the political, economic, governmental, religious, professional, social and civic life of a state."

Public involvement was essential:

Any highway safety program, of course, must have public support. No one official or group of officials can do the entire job by themselves. The people must want highway safety and be willing to support the necessary enforcement, legislative and educational measures to achieve it. The public, however, will only support something it understands. Information and education programs will help provide this basic understanding. So will the personal and vigorous leadership of the individual governors and legislators and enforcement officials. This leadership will serve to dramatize any highway safety campaign and help capture the imagination of the public and news medias.

The Governors could not, however, do it alone. "They need the support of the State legislators and of the various State officials who deal with highway safety and enforcement." He said:

I say to you legislators and you office holders who have to stand before the electorate that what is good for your state and good for your country is good politics. Highway safety is good for your state and for your country. And it's good politics.

Public Safety summarized the result of his plea for help:

They called the roll of the states the first week in December-from Alabama to Wyoming-and found legislators, public officials, top management of our state government ready, willing and able to mount an attack on the causes of highway accidents-to line up as one man to *Back the Attack on Traffic Accidents*.

The magazine could report a wide range of activities by the Nation's Governors in support of the campaign, such as:

- In Delaware, Governor J. Caleb Boggs's Safety Council was distributing Back the Attack material and coordinating State and local efforts to reduce traffic accidents.
- Governor William G. Stratton of Illinois asked for 600 more State police and legislation to put the Action Program into full effect. Secretary of State Charles Carpentier pledged full support for the Back the Attack campaign; his tough administration of the State's driver licensing law was one of the reasons he had been the State's top vote getter, after President Eisenhower, in the 1956 election.
- Indiana's new Governor Harold W. Handley, in his initial state-of-the-state speech to the General Assembly, called for 100-percent driver education in high schools, periodic vehicle inspection and periodic driver reexamination in accordance with the basic recommendations of the President's Committee for Traffic Safety. He also had designated a traffic safety team to promote his concepts.
- Governor Edmund S. Muskie of Maine had been the first State executive to support Back the Attack. Every Maine county, city, and town enlisted in the campaign for a balanced safety program based on the Action Program. Every Maine newspaper had pledged to support the campaign, and the State sent TV shots and audio tapes to TV and radio stations stressing the hazards of driving.
- Governor Mennen Williams had lined up 150 key Michigan officials to promote adoption of the Action Program at every level of government.
- Minnesota's Governor Orville L. Freeman had the Highway Department and State Highway Patrol distributing Back the Attack campaign literature. The State's 116 local safety councils were doing the same.
- Governor Robert B. Meyner held a Governors Highway Safety Conference in New Jersey to promote broad support for traffic safety activities. Groups met throughout the State to enlist every citizen in the cause.
- New York Governor Averill Harriman called on officials and the public to support the campaign. His Division of Safety sent out half a dozen mailings in support of public involvement.
- Governor Luther H. Hodges called officials throughout North Carolina to support the Action Program. The Commissioner of Motor Vehicles had enlisted 200 local leaders to spread the word, while 30 State Highway Patrol sergeants and 30 driver improvement representatives had given Back the Attack campaign material to every civic, educational, industrial, and religious organization.
- In Ohio, Governor C. William O'Neill established a safety team to back a six-point legislative program to enact the Back the Attack campaign: a point system to effect driver improvement, motor vehicle inspection, improved driver education in high schools, licensing of adult driver training school, and an increase in State Highway patrolmen and Driver License Examiners.
- Governor Frank Goad Clement of Tennessee included spot checks on the road, "drunknets," strict enforcement of traffic laws, and increased education programs.
- Wisconsin's Governor Vernon W. Thompson was an enthusiastic supporter who gave high priority to the Annual Inventory of Safety Activities, and used the results of the analyses by the National Safety Council to initiate remedial action at the grass roots level. The Wisconsin State Motor Vehicle Department worked at the local level to implement the Action Program.

The Federal Government was also doing its part to Back the Attack. The Post Office Department, which operated the largest motor fleet in the world, enlisted the Department's 90,000 drivers and 37,000 postmasters and other officials in the campaign. Acting Postmaster General Maurice H. Stans explained:

In keeping with the findings of the President's Regional Conference on Traffic Safety, "that the responsibility for safety programs should be delegated back to the grass roots authorities, the drivers and pedestrians," a "back to the people" trend was started, and the year-round *Back the Attack on Traffic Accidents* campaign was born.

The armed forces also had backed the campaign since President Eisenhower endorsed it. The U.S. Air Force supplemented its highway safety activities with activities in support of the campaign. In Texas, for example, "traffic teams" were established at every base to reduce the accident toll. At Holloman Air Development Center in New Mexico, the Aero Medical Field Laboratory hosted automobile safety experts to demonstrate the effectiveness of seat belts. Dr. and Lt. Colonel John P. Stapp, the center's chief, told them, "The number of military personnel killed each year in auto accidents is a needless waste of manpower to the defense efforts, since a large percentage would be saved if they were willing seat belts."

The Fifth Army headquarters in Chicago coordinated all traffic control and accident prevention activities within the Back the Attack campaign. Activities included orienting all personnel in safe-driving rules. At Fort Rucker in Alabama, personnel leaving the base were given a copy of "Words to the Wise," which ended, "Drive Carefully! Have a pleasant trip-not a death trip!"

The United States Marine Corps cracked down on traffic offenders. The crackdown spared no one "not even officers or ladies," according to *Public Safety*.

In short, the Back the Attack campaign was being implemented in all 48 States, at the State and local levels, by officials and citizen groups, and by the media. The National Safety Council reported that the initiative was having an effect in the form of a lower death toll. In February 1957, traffic deaths dropped 7 percent (2,540 compared with 2,730 in February 1956), only the third time in 2 years that traffic deaths had decreased. By July, *Public Safety* reported that the Nation had experienced declines in eight straight months. About 250 fewer people had been killed in traffic accidents by that point.

In April 1957, the President's Committee for Traffic Safety called for a meeting with State and local officials in Washington on December 9 and 10. The goal was to assess the status of traffic accident prevention efforts and set priorities for needed measures. Delegates were to be selected by national organizations of public officials from groups with traffic safety responsibilities. In advance of the conference, delegates would be asked to assess their activities in relation to the Action Program. The results would help determine immediate and long-range needs.

As a followup, the President's Committee announced it would sponsor regional conferences in 1958-March 11-12 in Atlantic City, New Jersey; April 1-2 in Chicago; April 8-9 in San Francisco; and May 29-30 in Miami Beach.

Harlow H. Curtice on Highway Safety

The Board of Directors of the National Safety Council met on June 27, 1957, at the General Motors Technical Center in Warren, Michigan. Harlow Curtice, a long-time trustee of the Council as well as Chairman of the President's Committee for Traffic Safety, addressed the Board. He saluted the Council and its important work:

I know of no organization that does a better job of bringing together groups from every major segment of our economy—business and industry, labor, agriculture, education, government and many others—of bringing these groups together and coordinating their efforts to produce effective results. The record speaks for itself.

The 1957 record had been encouraging. He said, "perhaps your efforts and ours are beginning to pay off in fewer accidents and fewer deaths." He cautioned, however, that "a slight decrease in one year provides no real basis for optimism and could encourage unwarranted and dangerous complacency." Although highway safety advocates could not "afford to relax our efforts," he was concerned about a growing trend:

Unfortunately, there are some well-meaning but unrealistic critics who appear to believe that much of the answer to greater traffic safety lies in radical changes in car design—with the government perhaps as chief engineer.

I say "unfortunately" because the publicity these critics receive serves to divert attention from the areas where the greatest progress can be made.

Of the other factors, progress was being made on one of the most important, highway modernization. "The current federal-state program will certainly make a great contribution to safety as well as to economic progress and national security." He explained:

The most pressing need now is for intensified effort on the two other major factors in a balanced program. These are enforcement and education. These two are obviously interrelated, because both have to do with the real key to the problem: the driver.

He called for the country to switch from an emphasis on defensive driving as protection against the "reckless and the incompetent"—and go on the offensive:

By that I mean that we need now to stress the importance of taking the offensive when not behind the wheel rather than relying solely on defensive action while driving.

We must encourage the public to back strong action against recklessness and incompetence. This should be done by giving more solid support to sound official measures in the areas of enforcement and driver licensing. It is here that we can hope for the immediate results that it is unrealistic to expect from education.

In closing, he reassured the Board of Directors of GM's support:

Speaking for General Motors, I assure you again of our continued interest in the vital objectives of the Council and our desire to help you move toward their fuller attainment.

Mobilizing the Latent Force

The President had been expected to address the traffic safety conference in Washington on December 9-10, 1957, but did not do so. Two weeks earlier, he had experienced a mild stroke and was still experiencing difficulty with enunciation. As part of his recovery, he

spent a long weekend recuperating at his home in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, before returning to Washington on the afternoon of Tuesday, December 9. *The New York Times* reported on the President's return to the city:

The return drive to Washington was made through an occasional drizzle over roads that were generally wet. There were approximately one dozen automobiles following the President's limousine; a few official cars, but mostly reporters and photographers.

A slight sideswipe, a near-miss and a police patrol's admonition about "too many cars two-abreast" led [press secretary James] Hagerty to propose afterward that the number of following cars be limited in the future.

The police warning was given to the President's driver, but the President's car was not involved in the sideswipe or the near miss.

Harlow Curtice opened the conference by calling for sound and aggressive leadership on the part of public officials as the key ingredient in solving the traffic accident problem. In view of widespread public support for highway safety measures, he said, "favorable public sentiment can be translated into effective public support only when there is sound and aggressive leadership to mobilize and direct this latent force." He was convinced that the best device for success was a citizens' traffic safety organization in every State and community.

Governor Ribicoff, chairing the conference, told delegates that accidents could be cut in half, and 20,000 lives saved every year if States would implement a balanced, integrated, continuing traffic safety program:

The governors must spearhead the highway safety campaigns in their states. Policemen, judges, motor vehicle commissioners, and other officials can't function properly unless their governor backs them up. If they know the governor is on their side, they will do a first-rate job.

Governor Stratton of Illinois addressed the conference on the Federal-State issue. He was chairman of the Governors' Conference, a member of the President's Committee for Traffic Safety, and an *ex officio* member of the Joint Federal-State Action Committee. He said:

The responsibility for traffic safety is ours because local and state governments are best fitted for the responsibility. I realize fully there are, nevertheless, those who are concerned lest the drift toward federal intervention—a drift, incidentally, which many of us are currently working to stop—may mean some type of federal policing of the highways in the state.

We would be indeed blind if, because we know this job is our responsibility at the state and local level, we sat back in the false assumption that federal intervention in this field cannot become a reality.

The conference adopted 14 major priorities, as reported by *Traffic Safety* (the National Safety Council renamed *Public Safety* magazine beginning with the July 1957 issue):

- Tightening of driver licensing requirements.

- Expansion of basic research into causes of accidents and congestion.
- Establishing of official traffic safety coordinating committees in every state, county and municipality.
- Stepped-up improvement of highways, utilizing modern design standards, including control of access.
- Standardize penalties for traffic law violators by establishing minimum limits for fines and jail sentences.
- Analyze police traffic law enforcement policies, programs, manpower and equipment.
- Develop widespread public understanding of the advantages and need for control of access on highways constructed under the nation's new road program.
- Adopt vehicle laws, based on the Uniform Vehicle Code, starting with statutes dealing with drivers' licenses, Rules of the Road, accident records and reports, and equipment.
- Resurvey motor vehicle functions and activities in each state, in light of the greatly-expanded highway program.
- Establish in every state an official traffic coordinating committee representing all state departments and agencies having authority and responsibility for traffic control and accident prevention.
- Organize coordinating committees of city or county officials to develop traffic safety programs with the support of local citizens groups.
- Appropriate more funds in states and cities for accident record-keeping equipment.
- Assign full-time professional information officers in each governmental agency concerned with motor vehicle traffic, to handle public information; give the information officers adequate budget and facilities and the personal support of top administrative and legislative officials.
- Accelerate and broaden activity in the field of basic traffic safety research, especially into the causation of accidents.

The four regional conferences in the spring would be designed to support these recommendations.

When the conferences had been announced, 1957 had been a safer year through July than the first 7 months of 1956. August ended the string of lower totals with a 5 percent increase in fatalities compared with August 1956. *Traffic Safety* magazine attributed the increase to the fact that August 1956 included five Saturdays, one of which was the first day of the Labor Day holiday weekend. The number of deaths in September was lower than in the year before, approximately the same in October, and lower in November and December.

As 1957 came to an end, the results were promising. Deaths on the Nation's highways totaled 38,500, down 3 percent from 1956. The fatality rate hit an all-time low of 5.9 per 100 million vehicle miles traveled. Deaths were down 3 percent in rural areas and 2 percent in urban areas. Based on the drop, the National Safety Council calculated that 1,100 traffic deaths had been avoided.

Given the lower fatalities in 1957, the National Safety Council decided to extend its Back the Attack campaign through 1958. President Eisenhower agreed:

It is encouraging to learn that the concerted drive of the National Safety Council has reduced the toll of traffic accidents during the first half of 1957. This shows how public officials and private citizens working together can bring some measure of control to the traffic problem which plagues the nation. But we cannot relax our efforts to reduce the number of injuries and deaths on our highways.

By extending the BACK THE ATTACK safety campaign through 1958, we can continue to build a stronger traffic program in every state and community.

You have my earnest hope for the success of the campaign.

Williamsburg Conference

The President's Committee for Traffic Safety sponsored a conference on February 23-28, 1958, in Williamsburg, Virginia, of leading scientists representing many fields of research, "from psychiatry to city planning and engineering" (as the BPR's 1958 annual report put it) and traffic safety experts to "generate new ideas for traffic-safety research, particularly in the field of human behavior."

Opening remarks were by J. O. Mattson, Vice Chairman of the Advisory Council to the President's Committee for Traffic Safety and President of the Automotive Safety Foundation. He began by quoting Harlow Curtice, who called the investigation into highway traffic behavior "the most urgent and challenging project that confronts the American people today." Mattson agreed, calling traffic accidents "the Nation's No. 1 lifesaving challenge." He recited the familiar but grim statistics: 38,500 lives lost, 1.3 million injured, and an economic loss of \$5 billion.

"I doubt," he said, "that the amount expended for traffic-safety research in 1957 would reach one-half of 1 percent of that figure."

Mattson noted the three things on which highway safety rests: the highway, the vehicle, and the individual driver or pedestrian. He had "great hope" that the conference would shed light on each of the three:

Assembled here is a truly remarkable group of scientists and philosophers. Indeed this Conference is unique, marking as it does the first time that representatives of so many scientific disciplines have gathered in one room for such an inquiry.

He anticipated "bold new concepts, approaches, and ideas" that would provide "the basis for an orderly pursuit of our ultimate goal."

Conferees were divided into three groups to study:

1. A systems approach to traffic flow and driver behavior
2. The psychology of driver behavior.
3. The social context of the automobile, its use and regulation.

Traffic Flow and Driver Behavior. A summary of results in the June 1958 issue of *Traffic Safety* indicated that a "vigorous research effort aimed at measuring actual traffic dynamics and actual driver-car behavior in various traffic situations" was needed to "delineate dangerous situations and to indicate ways whereby new road and automobile design and modified traffic rules can increase traffic flow and reduce traffic hazard." At least four coordinated activities were indicated:

1. Recording and analysis of actual traffic flow;
2. Using simulation of traffic flow to measure the parameters of traffic dynamics;

3. Equipping special cars to measure driver behavior in relation to the traffic environment; and
4. Developing a driver simulator to supplement other measurements.

A "great number of statistical indices" would be needed for "quantitative analysis." The program would, however, have to be supplemented by a "a methodical development of proper statistical techniques." The summary explained:

The development of such techniques involves an additional dimension of statistical research; what amounts to a demography or an epidemiology of traffic behavior. This should be carefully coordinated with a continuing, nationwide, standardized, statistical reporting system (corresponding to vital statistics, etc.).

The Psychology of Driver Behavior. The second group of conferees found that driver behavior was composed of three elements: input, organization, and output. The summary pointed out that the three need not be investigated separately, because they are linked, but were described separately for convenience:

Input is of external and of internal origin, arising in the external environment or from within the organism. The input is integrated and made meaningful by the organization factor, which selects that which will become output from available motor skills.

Intensive investigation was needed in each area. Research was needed on "what constitutes effective input and the variance of its effect on output." Organization had to be studied on the conceptual or symbolic level, requiring "higher integrative processes" and a high degree of driver awareness, as well as on the "more automatic" level, requiring less awareness. How, the scientists wanted to know, can the level of less awareness replace the highly variable activities of greater awareness (in other words, "How may 'big brother' controls substitute even for the more automatic driver behaviors?").

The scientists also wanted to examine motivational systems that affected the organization factor. For example, what are the motivational factors, and how are they influenced by education or social pressure? What are effective rewards and punishments and how can they be incorporated into driver education?

In studying output, a driver simulator was essential. However, the summary noted that, "Research must not be limited to the driver; the passenger and the pedestrian require the same intensive study.

Social Context of the Automobile. Researchers concluded that in planning research, they must view auto crashes from several perspectives.

- One was the place of the automobile in American life and its different subcultures in relation to other aspects of the total pattern of life-"historical, political, legal, economic, recreational, technological, familial, etc."
- Driving was also a social activity "or dynamic social game" by the driver interacting with passengers, other drivers, pedestrians, and law officers while requiring conformity to a "socially defined set of rules whose violation constitutes anti-social behavior."
- Finally, the researchers saw automobile use as an economic activity that involves "choosing between benefits and costs (including indirect and non-monetary benefits and costs) and how they should be allocated and who is to bear their burden." They added that the "usual market mechanism" that economists

speaking of "fails in this area to allocate the burden and to encourage the economizing of human life, time and money."

To evaluate social context, researchers needed "more valid and reliable measures of traffic safety"; analysis of the relationship between serviceable indices and meaningful subdivision of the population to generate new hypotheses for explaining highway accidents and attempting corrective actions; testing of promising hypotheses, techniques, and devices; systematic examination of the combinations of factors that result in acceptance and nonacceptance of safety measures; and study of possible changes in the allocation of responsibility for traffic regulation and safety among governmental and other agencies.

In summary, the scientists called for additional work in laboratories and field situations, with research supported on a long-range basis, as well as a short-term basis. Further, "To the extent possible, research should be conducted by organizations with a maximum of research talents and a minimum of inappropriate pressures."

Aim to Live!

Under the leadership of Harlow Curtice, GM launched a national highway safety campaign in early 1958 called Aim to Live! ("Sponsored by General Motors in the Interest of Highway Safety"). The corporation planned to enlist its 19,000 dealers, plus garages and service stations, to promote safety-aimed headlights for all makes and models of cars. The campaign had three goals:

1. Urging every motorist to have his headlights aimed immediately and then have them regularly inspected twice a year.
2. Encouraging motorists to observe the "dimming" rule on streets and highways.
3. Alerting drivers to limit their speed at night so they can come to a safe stop in the vision distance their headlights afford.

The campaign included an educational campaign on the hazards of night driving and tips for driving safely at night.

Curtice urged every motorist to join the "Aim to Live" campaign. "Properly aimed headlights, together with correct dimming habits and alert driving, can help stem the loss of so many lives on our highways at night."

Traffic Safety, in reporting on the campaign, indicated that Curtice said that better night vision had been a vital concern of the auto industry for years. The article stated:

Many years of research preceded adoption of the sealed beam headlamp in 1940, a significant advance in night safety. Similar research produced the four-lamp system now standard on General Motors cars. The four-lamps increase driver vision by at least 15 per cent.

Curtice said that regardless of the type of headlamp, they should all be checked at least twice a year to be sure their aim is not disturbed by normal road shocks, impacts while parking, and "settling in" of suspension systems. He said:

We owe it to ourselves, our families and our neighbors to "Aim to Live." Sparing minutes for headlight aiming now might spare lives later.

The campaign reflected a larger national initiative, the National Vehicle Safety-Check for Communities, sponsored by the Inter-Industry Highway Safety Committee and *Look* magazine. The voluntary 10-point Safety-Check included brakes, exhaust system, front lights, glass,

horn, rear lights, rear-view mirror, steering, tires, and windshield wipers. In 1957, a record 2.6 million vehicles had been checked. For the third straight year, rear lights were found to be the most frequently in need of immediate service. H. D. Tompkins, Chairman of the Committee, explained that, "With *more* people driving *more* vehicles, more miles, and with every fifth vehicle a potential traffic hazard, each motorist must assume individual responsibility for driving safely in a safety-checked car."

In April, GM presented two other ideas on traffic safety when the Governors Conference Special Committee on Highway Safety met in Detroit at the invitation of the Automobile Manufacturers Association. The Governors visited the GM Proving Grounds and the GM Technical Center to learn about GM's road design plan and its experimental automotive control system. *Automotive News* explained:

GM's road-design plan is aimed at preventing or lessening severity of off-the-road accidents by removing roadside trees and other obstacles, flattening road shoulders and grading parallel drainage ditches and ravines.

For roadside obstacles which cannot be removed, GM suggested properly designed and anchored guard rails to reduce accident severity.

The committee also got a look at the GM Research Staff's experimental Unicontrol car, which eliminates the traditional mechanical linkage between steering wheel and front wheel. The driver simply moved a knobbed four-inch stick beside him to left or right and the wheels are controlled electronically.

To accelerate, he pushes the stick forward. To brake, he pulls it backward. Wires connect the stick and steering, throttle and brakes. An electronic computer and hydraulic power supply comprise the rest of the system.

The Governors also visited Ford's Research and Engineering Center and the Ford test track to learn about the company's work on an electronic device that would warn a driver when he or she is too close to the car ahead of him. The project was one result of an expressway study Ford conducted with the Detroit Department of Streets and Traffic. The study found that speed (driving too fast for conditions) was the major factor in 45.5 percent of the accidents. Cutting in (26.2 percent) and following too closely (20.6 percent) were the other major factors. Over 73 percent of the expressway accidents were on straight sections while accidents on on-ramps accounted for 13.5 percent of the total.

In response to the finding that following too closely was a factor in 20 percent of the accidents, Ford was developing a system that would gauge headlight illumination to determine if a vehicle is too close to the vehicle in front of it. If so, a warning light would flash on the rear of the lead vehicle. Because of reliance on the headlight, the device could only be used at night.

Regional Conferences, 1958

The first of the regional highway safety conferences was held in Atlantic City on March 11. President Eisenhower had recorded a message on film and tape that was played to the delegates at the start of each safety conference:

First, I want to express my personal appreciation to each of you for attending this Conference. You are all taking valuable time from crowded personal schedules. You have come at your own expense. You have done so because you feel a most commendable sense of responsibility for the always urgent business of Highway Traffic Safety.

Second, I am delighted to see that progress is being made in the fine work you are doing. The National Safety Council reports a saving of 1,100 lives and the lowest mileage death rate in the nation's history in 1957. This is the kind of news we all like to hear.

It proves that something can and is being done to overcome the terrible march of death, personal injury and billions of dollars in property damage on our public roads.

Those in charge of the program for this Conference advise me that you are convened for two primary purposes: first, to bring you up to date on the very latest traffic safety needs. Second, to enlist your leadership in developing the widest possible support for the action programs required to meet these needs. Every year, inventories are made of the traffic-control activities of all the States and cities of the Nation. The most recent inventories show that the average safety performance of all the 48 States has reached only 58 percent of the minimum standards-that is, the States have applied only about half of the basic traffic-safety program. The performance of cities is reported as no better.

If this record is to be improved, every State, county, and local official with responsibility for traffic control must have organized citizen support. This is why you as leaders in your States and communities have been asked to attend this Conference.

So, my plea to you is: give your support in making certain that your safety needs are met as promptly as possible. More importantly, give the leadership that is indispensable if public support is to be effective.

Action is the answer. Cooperation is the means. I am confident you'll give an excellent account of yourselves and the results will be most rewarding.

Former Governor Pyle again represented the President. Pyle told the 900-plus delegates that the United States "simply can't afford the losses we continue to suffer from traffic accidents."

As the conference ended the following day, the Conference Chairman, E. F. du Pont (of E. I. du Pont de Nemours and Company, as well as a member of the Board of Directors of the National Safety Council), summarized the actions recommended by the delegates:

As we anticipated, there was considerable variation from state to state in the priority needs as determined by the delegates. Nevertheless, we find many safety measures for which rather general support has been expressed:

1. Broadening driver education.
2. Periodic driver re-examinations, especially for accident and violation repeaters.
3. Chemical tests for intoxication.
4. Improved enforcement, including such things as the uniform "non-fix" ticket and adequate highway patrols.

He added:

Most groups were emphatic that each state and each city needs a priority plan of traffic accident prevention: a definite, written plan—a plan which informs each group of what is needed—a plan which is coordinated and which has citizens and officials working together.

The Midwestern conference in Chicago on April 1-2 was attended by 1,400 delegates. It opened with a "President's Breakfast," during which delegates watched President Eisenhower's message and a film called "The No. 1 Lifesaving Challenge in America Today."

The chairman was Calvin Fentress, Jr., Chairman of the Board of Allstate Insurance Company. Although he was proud of the progress made thus far, he said a lasting solution "cannot be realized with lax or presumptuous leadership. It demands vigorous, forthright action and genuine cooperation."

Harlow Curtice told delegates an intensified research program was urgently needed. Nevertheless, Curtice told delegates, "we know enough right now to be able to cut the accident death toll in half within a relatively short time." He explained:

Our fundamental problem is not ignorance of what to do. It is failure to get it done on a sustained nationwide basis. We should concentrate more intensively on putting our knowledge to work, instead of casting about for revolutionary new approaches in the mistaken belief that present measures are futile.

After State groups met to discuss each State's needs, delegates attended interest group meetings for agriculture, business, civic/professional/fraternal, labor, parents/women, and religious.

In the end, Fentress thanked participants:

Such a nucleus of informed leadership is bound to do a real job in selling the programs discussed here. It's basically up to us to broaden public understanding of this salient fact: that every person, every business, every American institution loses needlessly from traffic accidents. The public must be reminded continually that our country's economic and national security are being threatened by the material and physical waste of traffic accidents.

Over 700 delegates from 11 western States attended the regional conference in San Francisco on April 8 and 9, with another 600 delegates from 12 southeastern States and Puerto Rico attending the conference in Miami Beach on May 29 and 30. Former Governor Pyle, representing the President, addressed both conferences, telling them, "Scientists have developed synthetic substitutes for all kinds of things. But in the endless fight against traffic accidents, there is no substitute for you—for responsible people."

In San Francisco, Mrs. Sayre (described as "the only woman member of the President's Committee for Traffic Safety" in *Traffic Safety*) told delegates, "Get the facts. Let your clubs know how they can help in the problem." James F. Crafts, President of the Fireman's Fund Insurance Company and Chairman of the Board of the California Traffic Safety Foundation, urged the delegates representing business interests to take an active role:

If business doesn't take an active part in solving the problem of traffic accidents, the federal government may well do the job for us. Traffic is you and your neighbor. When the time comes that you need the federal government to tell you how to use your streets and highways, you are in deep trouble.

In Miami Beach, Clarence Lott, Vice President of Southern Bell Telephone Company, called on citizens to do more than write a check for highway safety. Instead, they should provide "some of their time and talent in guiding and directing the activities" of safety organizations.

As summarized in *Traffic Safety*, delegates to the two regional conferences agreed that the top public support priorities were:

1. Broadening the driver education program;
2. Improving traffic courts;
3. Enacting new traffic laws;
4. Strengthening driver control;
5. Increasing enforcement and
6. Improving accident recording.

Tomorrow's Car

In 1947, Cornell University's Aeronautical Laboratory in Buffalo, New York, began applying its knowledge of airplane safety to the problem of packaging automobile passengers for maximum safety. The operating principle was that the crash of the vehicle was not the cause of injuries; the crash of humans on interior surfaces or the road surface was the cause. The Crash Injury Research Group of Cornell University's Medical College collected injury data on the vulnerabilities of the human body. Because of the vulnerability of the head, the first tests were on hen eggs, followed by plastic heads. Man-like dummies were constructed (nicknamed "Thin Man," "Thick Man," and "Half Pint").

The Liberty Mutual Insurance Company, which had sponsored the research on the "secondary crash," joined with the Cornell Aeronautical Laboratory in 1955 to design a Safety Car that would afford maximum protection to passengers. As summarized in the January 1958 issue of *Traffic Safety*, the Safety Car was based on six principles:

First, the car body was made strong enough to prevent most exterior blows from distorting the body against the passengers. Second, doors were secured in such a manner that crash forces could not open them. Thus passengers could not be thrown out and the structural strength of the side of the car body could be maintained. Third, passengers were secured within the car to prevent them from striking objects inside the car during a crash. Fourth, such dangerous objects as knobs, mirrors, and sharp edges were removed.

As *Traffic Safety* noted, these four principles were similar to those used in shipping a delicate package: "use a strong shipping case, fasten lid securely, pack tightly, and remove hard objects from padding." The two remaining principles were:

The driver's working environment was improved by increasing visibility, simplifying controls and instruments, and lowering the carbon monoxide of his breathing atmosphere. Also, dangerous objects were eliminated from the exterior of the car to increase the safety for pedestrians.

These principles were embodied in a car that was designed for exhibition around the country to show that styling did not have to be sacrificed for safety.

Some of the features incorporated into the Safety Car, as reported in *Traffic Safety*, were:

- The grille, hood, headlights and bumpers have been redesigned and the radiator ornament has been eliminated to minimize danger to the pedestrian.
- In the wrap-around bumper system, plastic foam material between the front and rear bumpers and the back-up plates absorbs some of the shock energy.
- The car has "accordion" doors, fashioned like telephone booths or bus doors for easy entrance and exit. They are securely closed by three bolt bars which keep the doors closed in a collision.
- Two roll-over bars, one over the front seat riders and one over the rear, have been incorporated into the top of the car body as added support.
- Bucket seats were decided upon to give better lateral support to the hips during a crash. Because the driver has the greatest exposure to an accident, he has been placed in the safest possible position-the center front seat-where he has more car body structure between him and the crash contact points. The other two front seats are placed on either side of the driver, slightly to the rear and slightly lower, so that they do not interfere with the vision or arm movements of the driver.
- All passengers are held securely in their seats to prevent them from becoming flying missiles during a crash. The driver is restrained in his seat by a curved control panel that rocks down into position and locks there. The front-seat riders are similarly restrained The two forward-facing rear passengers are held in their bucket seats by seat belts
- Space clearance between front and rear seats prevents the head of any rear passenger from striking a seat during a crash.
- As protection [against "whiplash"], the driver is provided with a pull-up headrest that can be quickly positioned. The other riders are protected by nylon harnesses to support the head.
- Knobs, projections, sharp edges and hard surfaces are absent to a great degree from the interior of the car.
- The driver is still further protected by the elimination of all objects in front of his legs.
- The ordinary steering wheel and steering post . . . has been eliminated. A guidance device which has a much lower injury potential has been devised which the driver pulls back into his lap, where it latches into position. In the new concept of steering developed for the Safety Car, steering power is supplied by hydraulic pressure.
- The instruments are placed well out of the range of the driver's head and are located just under the line of sight over the hood where they can be seen easily.
- The ventilation . . . efficiently and safely attacks [the carbon monoxide problem]
- The windshield allows almost 180 degree clear vision, and being circular in a horizontal plane, gives no annoying distortion patterns. Furthermore, since it has been designed as the frustum of a cone, the windshield will be well out of the range of the head of any properly restrained front passenger.

Traffic Safety summed up the importance of the Safety Car:

The first principle of safety in traffic is to drive carefully, with the car under as nearly perfect control as driving conditions will permit. The Cornell-Liberty Safety Car is an assembly of research design ideas to illustrate means of giving the passengers the best possible protection during the crash period of a traffic accident. These ideas, when improved upon and incorporated into production automobiles, may very well be the means of substantially reducing the ever-rising death and injury toll on our American highways.

Safety Slogan Fatigue

William Ullman, Washington Correspondent for *Automotive News*, reported in the issue of July 28, 1958, that the President's Committee for Traffic Safety had distributed a study that, in his opinion, was "likely to blow some fresh air into an area which occasionally gets a bit stuffy." He said:

Despite genuine concern over the high traffic accident rate, auto dealers, editors and others with a stake in the industry frequently suffer from a complaint called "safety slogan fatigue," brought on by an overdose of jingles, catchy phrases and righteous warnings asking us not to kill ourselves. Many have suspected that slogans have little effect on accidents, but few have dared to call them baloney in public. That would be like endorsing sin.

The study, *Centering Traffic Safety Communications Around Drivers' Motivations*, had been conducted by the Opinion Research Corporation of Princeton, New Jersey, for the American Trucking Associations Foundation and the Pure Oil Company of Chicago. Ullman summarized the key finding:

"What does a typical traffic-safety slogan like 'Drive Safely!' mean to the driver?" asked the survey.

The conclusion: "Nothing, probably."

Because each person thinks he or she is an above-average driver, motorists assumed the slogans were intended for some other driver.

"Scare" slogans also appeared to be ineffective. Death-toll statistics and images of wrecked vehicles created emotional reactions, but didn't provide any guidance on what a motorist should do.

Ullman concluded his summary of the study with the following comment:

One group of drivers thought police were "outstanding," believed safety problems were "all psychological" and favored driver education. This group, oddly enough, was made up of habitual traffic law violators.

Conferences for State Legislators

In addition to the four regional safety conferences, the President's Committee for Traffic Safety joined with the Council of State Governments to sponsor four regional conferences for State legislators. The conferences, conducted by the Traffic Institute of Northwestern University, had been suggested during the Washington conference in December 1957. Several State legislators expressed the view that a thorough briefing for their colleagues on the traffic safety problem would be helpful.

The conferences were scheduled for the fall, when State legislatures would be in recess, in Atlanta (October 7-10), Boston (November 9-12), Chicago (November 30-December 3), and Salt Lake City, Utah (December 7-10). J. W. Bethea, Executive Secretary of the President's Committee, said the conferences would be helpful to the States and the individual legislators because the sessions would give them "the basic facts of the traffic situation, the existing programs for reduction of the problem, and the requirements for alleviation which might be within the scope of state legislative action."

According to *Traffic Safety*, each conference began with an evening get-together, followed by 2 days of discussions on traffic safety. Topics for the conferences included:

- The Traffic Problem-National
- The Traffic Problem in Your States
- Objectives in Driver Licensing
- Street and Highway Traffic and Transportation Planning
- Traffic Education
- Traffic Policing
- Traffic Law Adjudication
- State Traffic Services to Communities
- Motor Vehicle Inspection
- Traffic Legislation
- Traffic Accident Investigation and Record Keeping
- A Coordinated Study Program to Meet Future Needs of Motor Vehicle Ownership and Use

Ike Stops By

With off-year elections for the United States Senate and House of Representatives to be held on November 4, President Eisenhower was in Chicago on October 22, 1958, for a radio and television address at the Republican Party's "Fight-to-Win" dinner rally. The rally was in the International Amphitheatre, where he had received the party's presidential nomination in 1952. Speaking at 8:30 pm, he told his fellow Republicans:

Here in Chicago, six years ago, I embarked, with all of you, upon a crusade for sound, efficient, progressive, trustworthy government here at home, and peace with justice in the world. That crusade I believe now, as I did then, is profoundly important to every one of us, to our country, to nations everywhere.

He listed the results. The Korean War ended. Communist military aggression frustrated. The mightiest army in history "reorganized for still greater efficiency and power." Power returned to the States, with 260,000 fewer Federal Government employees. It was a long list of achievements, but he asked the Republicans to consider just four:

- Runaway inflation checked;
- The St. Lawrence Seaway, so significant to this great inland empire;
- New nationwide super highways;
- A new Cabinet Department for Health, Education, and Welfare.

"Now," he added, "on the eve of election, we review and reaffirm that kind of purpose and accomplishment."

The President hoped to see a Senate and House with Republicans in the majority. The Democrats, he said, were dominated by a radical wing that had so split the party as to "constitute two distinct parties, masquerading under one name." Because of this "built-in antagonism, the opposition is incapable of offering America anything except deadlocked government." The choice in November, therefore, was significant. (After the November 4 election, the Democrats would retain control of Congress.)

After leaving the rally, he went with Illinois Governor Stratton and Senator Everett Dirksen of Illinois to the Conrad Hilton Hotel, which was the site of the 1958 National Safety Congress. With the annual banquet underway, the President was met at the entrance to the hotel and escorted to the grand ballroom by George C. Stewart, Executive Vice President of the National Safety Council and a former General on Eisenhower's staff during World War II.



President Eisenhower was a surprise speaker at the 1958 National Safety Conference in Chicago. His appearance made the cover of Traffic Safety magazine.

In brief remarks to the surprised delegates at 9:40 pm, the President began with a reference to Walter F. Carey, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the National Safety Council:

This evening I have been doing a bit of politicking, but your Chairman was kind enough to invite me in for a moment as I went back to my hotel, with the idea that he knew I would want to say to you a word of thanks and appreciation for the work you do in preserving human values and human life in this country.

I can't imagine any more important work, any more challenging work, and I would truly like to be sufficiently eloquent to express the feelings of the American people to those who give of their time, their effort and their substance to help our great country to be stronger and safer—who belong, in short, to the National Safety Council.

So, with this word of thanks for the warmth of your greeting, and for the work you are doing, I shall now say goodnight and be on my way.



As shown in *Traffic Safety* magazine, retired General George C. Stewart escorted President Eisenhower to the 1958 National Safety Conference.

Another important event of the National Safety Congress resulted from the fact that Ned H. Dearborn, the Council's President, had reached the mandatory retirement age and would soon leave office. The congress, therefore, included many tributes to Dearborn, who would become president emeritus.

When the Council's Board of Directors met on January 13,

1959, they elected former Governor Pyle, who had been a deputy assistant to the President since 1955, to succeed Dearborn. Although Pyle had served two terms as Governor of Arizona, he had begun his career in advertising and as a program manager and vice-president of KTAR, the Phoenix radio station. He also had been an overseas correspondent in the Pacific during World War II. *Traffic Safety* summarized his activities since moving to Washington:

For the past three years, Mr. Pyle has been a presidential assistant directing policy and liaison in the field of federal-state-local government relations. He was primarily responsible for development of the work of the new Joint Federal-State Action Committee for stronger, more responsible local government. He was the planning contact man for the President's Committee for Traffic Safety and the keynoter at many of the national and regional meetings called by the committee.

Chairman Carey said of the choice:

The National Safety Council is delighted that Mr. Pyle could accept an invitation to become its president. He has a background of public service and safety that fits him admirably for his responsibilities with the Council. We feel that we have been extremely fortunate in finding an ideal successor to Ned H. Dearborn.



Photo from the 1958 National Safety Conference in *Traffic Safety*, shows President Eisenhower addressing the annual banquet.

The Chairman Steps Down

Harlow Curtice, who had been President of GM since February 2, 1953, reached GM's mandatory retirement age of 65 on August 15, 1958. By tradition, GM's Board of Directors made no decision on a new President until after the 65th birthday of the current President.

As a result, industry observers were surprised when his retirement occurred on September 1, 1958, sooner than expected. Under Curtice, the company had expanded its physical facilities and captured more than 50 percent of the new-car market 1954 through 1956, but was challenged by labor strife and new threats from imported cars, particularly Germany's Volkswagen.

According to *Automotive News*, the departure of "Red" Curtice was met with "mixed emotions":

Curtice, at times as [fiery] as his nickname, has been hailed as a great leader on the one hand and also as a tyrant obsessed with a mania for sales at any cost.

The Board replaced not only Curtice but the leadership structure. Frederick G. Donner assumed the post of Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer. John F. Gordon became President. By combining the position of Chairman with that of the Chief Executive Officer, GM was returning to the era of Alfred P. Sloan, Jr., who had held the joint titles from 1937 to 1946.

The President's Committee for Traffic Safety also saw a change in leadership. Curtice resigned from the committee he had headed since its formation in April 1954. President Eisenhower appointed William Randolph Hearst, Jr., as the new Chairman.

Congress Considers Safety

In 1957, the Congress had considered several highway safety bills. One had been introduced by Senator A. S. Mike Monroney (D-Ok.), who proposed a Presidential Commission to attack the highway safety problem by pulling all the Federal Government's scattered safety activities together. Senator Lyndon B. Johnson (D-Tx.), the Majority

Leader, proposed to establish an automobile and highway division in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. The idea, the Senator explained, was to "promote research into improved designs for automobiles and highways to prevent accidents and to reduce the severity of injuries in automobile accidents." The unit would also collect information on accidents and conduct a public education campaign.

Chairman Roberts proposed a bill to provide Federal grants to States for driver-education programs in public schools. He recognized that cost would be a problem, but he had no qualms about the need for Federal involvement in highway safety:

The Federal government has a very great responsibility in protecting life and property in interstate commerce Even a modest start will be well worth the cost involved.

None of the bills made it into law that year.

As the second session of the 85th Congress began in January 1958, several bills were pending. Senator Monroney joined with Chairman Roberts in a new version of the 1957 bill. The Senator had decided against a Presidential Commission; he and Roberts now supported a Joint Congressional Subcommittee on Traffic Safety. William Ullman of *Automotive News* explained why:

The senator changed his mind about letting the Administration handle the job for several reasons. Presumably, the prior existence of the President's Committee on Traffic Safety, a group whose work has left the senator far from excited, influenced his decision. In addition, he wanted to recognize the important work already accomplished by Roberts.

Chairman Roberts had introduced a bill that would require new cars to include "reasonable safety devices" as prescribed by the Secretary of Commerce. In introducing the bill, Roberts explained that testimony before the subcommittee "indicates that scientists and engineers know which structural parts of the automobile are causing the greatest amounts of injury to persons in accidents. Action must be taken to remove these unnecessary hazards." He was particularly concerned about "proper packaging" to prevent interior contacts with the head, neck, and chest of passengers. "There is especially a need for greater use of padding in the interior of the car in order to help reduce head injuries for all persons. Padding should not be a costly optional item for just the wealthy few."

The Special Subcommittee completed its first legislative act when President Eisenhower signed Public Law 85-684 in October 1958. It granted congressional consent to States to negotiate and enter into interstate compacts for the promotion and carrying out of highway traffic safety. According to *Traffic Safety*:

This law is intended to activate states into voluntary cooperative effort in establishing and carrying out traffic safety programs. The Act specifies the following objectives: uniform traffic laws, driver education and training, coordination of traffic law enforcement, research into safe automobile and highway design and research on the human factors affecting traffic safety.

Representative Beamer of the subcommittee had introduced the initial House Joint Resolution 221 to reflect the view that the States had the authority to address the safety problem. The resolution had been passed unanimously by both House of Congress.

Although the Roberts bill on "reasonable safety devices," such as seat belts, was not enacted in the 85th Congress, the Chairman had not lost interest in the idea. In October 1958, Chairman Roberts addressed the Governors' Safety Conference. He intended to introduce the bill in the 86th Congress, he said. Before the Governors and in other speeches, Roberts claimed that seat belts could save 10,000 to 20,000 lives annually. He considered industry action "weak and lacking in purpose" and charged that "so far, the industry has not even seen fit to build attachment points for seat belts at the factory."

His presentation irritated Ullman, a longtime observer of the auto industry, who took exception to the claim that the industry was "dragging its feet" on installation of safety belts. In his weekly "Automotive Washington" column in *Automotive News* for October 27, 1958, Ullman described the industry's safety activities, including its cooperation with the Special Subcommittee. Ralph Isbrandt of American Motors Corporation, Ullman pointed out, had explained to the subcommittee that many drivers removed the safety belts installed in the 1949 Nash cars. Isbrandt said:

The motoring public at that time appeared to be just not ready for seat belts. This experience proved, without a doubt, that seat belts would not "sell themselves" and that to promote their use successfully would require an extensive educational campaign.

GM's Charles A. Chayne agreed. Although GM had unveiled its first seat belt in 1951, surveys indicated that "public acceptance and demand might be extremely small."

Robert S. McNamara, Vice President of Ford Motor Company, informed the Special Committee that Ford had contributed \$200,000 to Cornell's crash-injury research on seat belts in 1955. He agreed that seat belts could reduce deaths and injuries, but was disappointed "that the acceptance of seat belts by many groups interested in highway safety has been slow."

Ullman, noting that Roberts had not informed the Governors of Ford's involvement in the Cornell research, pointed out the industry's involvement in seat belt research:

Roberts described the Air Force rapid-deceleration tests at Holloman Air Force Base as "heroic" but didn't tell the governors that GM had given the Air Force its own snubber-testing equipment for the tests.

Roberts failed to tell his audience that most of what is known today about auto seat belts is the result of research conducted or financed by the automobile industry.

He did not say that the industry has contributed more than \$1.5 million during 1958 alone to outside agencies engaged in traffic research, including another grant of \$150,000 to support the crash-injury study program at Cornell

Roberts omitted any mention of the Automotive Safety Foundation and the Inter-Industry Highway Safety Committee, both of which the auto industry helped to found and continues to support.

But while he carefully skipped over every safety activity of U.S. auto makers, Roberts had plenty to say about Detroit's presumed ability to block safety legislation.

Blaming the industry for failure of the safety device bill, Ullman said, "is, of course, ridiculous."

Ullman suggested that Detroit auto executives "make a safer target for a Congressional safety investigator than those American motorists who actually have the accidents. Motorists, after all, would like to blame somebody else for their accidents, too, and they represent a lot of votes."

As the 85th Congress came to an end, some discussion was given to expanding the Roberts Subcommittee to a Joint Senate-House Committee on Traffic Safety, as suggested by the Monroney-Roberts bill. However, when the 86th Congress assembled in January 1959, the Roberts Subcommittee was eliminated. Instead, Representative Roberts became Chairman of the new Subcommittee on Health and Safety under the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce. The new subcommittee had a broader jurisdiction than its predecessor, covering public health and quarantine, food and drugs, hospital construction grants, and safety (including air safety and air pollution as well as highway safety).

In 1958, highway safety advocates could report progress in reducing fatalities on the Nation's roads. The total of 36,981 deaths continued the decline reported for 1957.

[◀ Chapter 2: A Crusade for Safety](#)

[Chapter 4: The Federal Role in Highway Safety ▶](#)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Federal Highway Administration

1200 NEW JERSEY AVENUE, SE

WASHINGTON, DC 20590

202-366-4000

Subscribe To Email Updates



About

- About FHWA
- Careers
- Org Chart
- Staff Directories
- Work with Us

Programs

- Acquisition Management
- Civil Rights
- Federal Lands Highway
- Infrastructure
- Innovative Program Delivery
- Operations
- Planning, Environment, and Realty
- Policy
- Research, Development, and Technology
- Safety

Policies, Rights, Legal

- About DOT
- Budget and Performance
- Civil Rights
- FOIA
- Information Quality
- No FEAR Act
- Office of Inspector General
- Privacy Policy
- USA.gov
- Web Policies and Notices
- Web Standards

News & Events

- Newsroom
- Press Releases
- Speeches & Testimony
- Media Contacts
- Connect with Us