

# Safety is Our North Star

Series: FHWA Highway History Website Articles

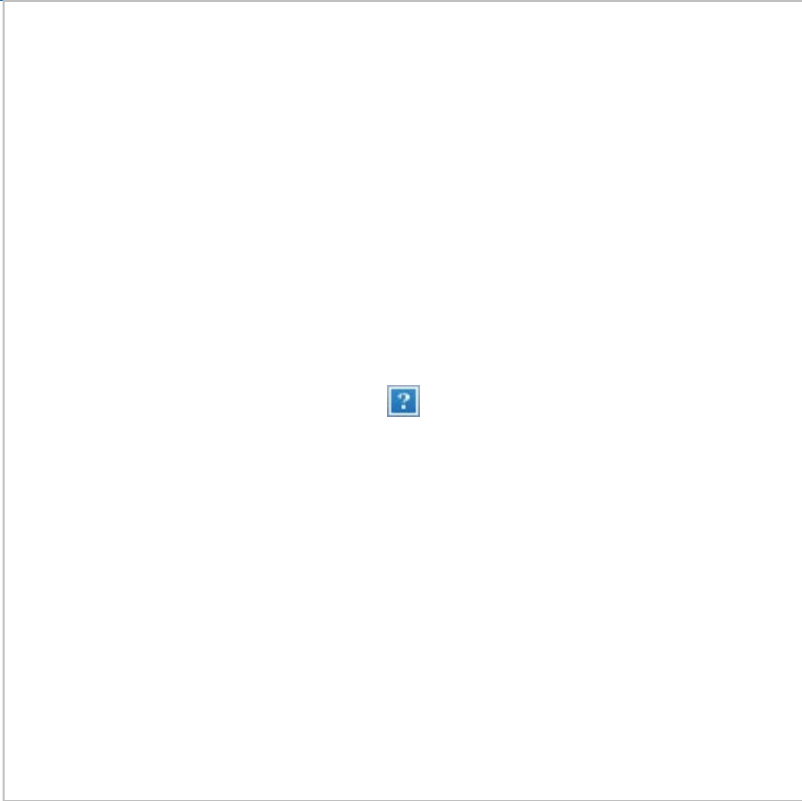
June 1999



U.S. Department of Transportation  
Federal Highway Administration  
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Washington, DC 20590

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/ [Public Roads](#)

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and Technology

---

Research Resources  
Overview

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Public Roads  
Magazine

---

## Public Roads - May/June 1999

**Date:** May/June 1999

**Issue No:** Vol. 62 No. 6

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## Safety Is Our North Star

*This article was adapted from information provided by the U.S. Department of Transportation.*

U.S. Secretary  
of  
Transportation  
Rodney E.  
Slater is fond of  
saying,  
"Transportation  
is about more  
than concrete,  
asphalt, and  
steel - it is about  
people." And  
that point was  
amply  
underscored to  
the participants  
in the National  
Transportation



**Jose Diaz-Balart of "CBS This Morning" was the moderator for the Nationwide Town Meeting during the National Transportation Safety Conference on March 2, 1999.**

Safety Conference, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) and held in Washington, D.C., on March 2 and 3, 1999.

The conference opened with a national town hall meeting that included the 442 conference participants in Washington and, via a satellite teleconferencing hookup, 141 people in Atlanta, Detroit, and San Francisco. Slater told the assembly of representatives of government, industry, trade, labor, and law enforcement that the top priority of DOT is to save lives and prevent transportation-related injuries. He touted the federal government's record-level investment of \$3.4 billion for direct safety programs in the fiscal year 2000 budget, and he was very proud that the U.S. airlines transported 615 million passengers in 1998 without a single fatal accident.

"Safety is our North Star by which we in DOT will be

guided and judged," Slater said. But he emphasized the need for everyone to be part of a partnership to provide a safe transportation environment.

"Safety is a promise we make together," he said.

"Something special happens when we make a promise to each other."

Then, all the town hall meeting participants - including Slater; the administrators of all the DOT agencies; mayors Bill Campbell of Atlanta, Dennis Archer of Detroit, and Willie Brown of San Francisco; and safety spokesmen Ricky Williams, the 1998 Heisman Trophy winner, and Jimmy Vassar, lead driver of the champion Target Chip Ganassi racing team - signed individual safety pledge cards.



**Secretary of Transportation Slater said, "Safety is a promise we make together. Something special happens when we make a promise to each other."**

The conference had at least two significant outcomes, both of which emphasized the partnership and promise themes. The first was the beginning of a transportation safety action plan based on the participants' suggestions about specific strategies to save lives and reduce injuries. The second was a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in which Slater; U.S. Surgeon General Dr. David Satcher; and the chiefs of industry, trade, labor, and law enforcement organizations pledged to work as partners to provide safe work environments, advocate safety in their organizations, provide safety education to employees, make safety a priority in organizational activities, and to be partners in the National Transportation Safety Action Plan. In addition, DOT agreed to assist in the development of educational programs and materials on transportation safety.

Slater said that, in the coming months, the department will develop a safety action plan to build on its comprehensive safety strategy and to continue its successful efforts in decreasing the rate of injuries and fatalities attributed to the national transportation system.

### **Key Initiatives**

Key initiatives, some of which are already underway and others which were announced at the conference, will be part of the comprehensive effort to improve safety in all modes of transportation. Among them are the following.

#### **Child Safety**

Dr. Ricardo Martinez, head of the department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) yesterday announced the availability of the 1999 brochure, "Buying a Safer Car for Child Passengers," jointly produced and distributed by NHTSA and the American Automobile Association (AAA). The brochure will provide information to make it easier for families to shop for safety when buying or leasing a new car. Likewise, when fully implemented, the new requirement for universal child safety-seat attachments, which President Clinton announced Feb. 27 in his radio address, will make it easier to properly install child safety seats and result in an estimated 50 lives saved and 3,000 injuries prevented each year. Making it easier for parents to buy the right vehicle and to properly place their children in safety seats will help achieve the president's goal to reduce child fatalities by 25 percent by 2005.

#### **Aviation Safety**

In April 1998, Vice President Gore announced that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), in partnership with industry, had adopted a safety agenda designed to bring about a five-fold reduction in fatal aircraft accidents. Under this initiative, called "Safer Skies," FAA will concentrate its resources on the most prevalent causes of aircraft accidents and use special teams of technical experts to zero in on the leading causes of aviation disasters and recommend safety

advances. On March 2, 1999, the National Transportation Safety Board reported that in 1998, for the first time since it has been compiling statistics, there were no passenger fatalities on scheduled U.S. airlines. In addition, there were no major accidents in 1998.

### **Maritime Safety**

A maritime conference concluded in November produced a vision for the year 2020, stating that the U.S. marine transportation system will be the world's most technologically advanced, safe, secure, efficient, accessible, globally competitive, dynamic, and environmentally responsible system for moving goods and people. To build on the conference's work, a task force composed of private stakeholders and government representatives is to assess the adequacy of the nation's marine transportation system and report its findings to Congress by July 1.

### **Truck Safety**

Secretary Slater appointed former U.S. Rep. Norman Y. Mineta to head an effort to review motor carrier safety programs and submit findings by late spring. Findings are to summarize strategies now in use and functional areas on which the motor carrier safety program is focused, views of outside interested parties, and ways the program can be improved, including where it should be located in the department.

### **Safety Among Under-Served Communities**

At a National Diversity Forum Feb. 24, Slater said that traffic safety for minorities



**The participants in the town meeting each signed an individual pledge to make safety a personal priority.**

and other, hard-to-reach groups, including people with disabilities and rural and inner city residents, was a priority agenda item. He called on representatives of more than 80 minority groups and traditional safety

organizations at the forum to help reduce traffic deaths and injuries, especially among minorities, by encouraging motorists to buckle up, use child safety seats, and avoid drinking and driving.

### Improved Information for Public Safety Policy

Slater announced that NHTSA will distribute nearly \$5 million in incentive grants to improve traffic safety data systems in 47 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Guam, the Virgin Islands, American Samoa, and the Northern Marianas Islands. In addition, the Bureau of Transportation Statistics will hold a series of listening sessions to discuss the need for more extensive and reliable safety data collection. Also, the Federal Highway Administration last week announced a streamlining of its Highway Performance Monitoring System to reduce the burden on the states, which provide the data; to focus more sharply on important information; and to provide better service to all Americans.

### Signed on for Safety

I, Stephen M. Malhotra promise to make safety my highest priority each and every day, for myself, my family, my friends and co-workers.

**I will always:**

- Be alert and stay sober
- Buckle up and use child safety seats
- Stay in control and respect speed limits
- Obey all signs, signals, instructions and safety rules
- Avoid all safety and security risks



### Safety for Aging Adults

The department now is assessing the transportation needs of a growing aging population and will draft a national agenda by November, addressing the transportation needs of the U.S. population as it ages. The initiative builds on a January 1997 department study that suggested that transportation safety could become a substantial problem for older adults. It will involve participation from safety experts, engineers, state and community authorities, medical and social service providers, law enforcement, industry, and interest groups. Listening sessions will be held around the nation.



## **We Can Do Better**

Each year, about 44,500 people lose their lives in transportation-related incidents, and another 3.4 million are injured. Insurance, lost wages, health care, and other costs exceed \$165 billion annually, and losses in terms of human suffering are incalculable. Most transportation-related fatalities occur on the nation's roadways - 41,967 in 1997. In that year, the nation's traffic fatality rate dropped to the lowest level since record-keeping began in 1966. The 1997 rate - 1.6 fatalities per 100 million miles (161 million kilometers) traveled - is less than one-third the 1966 rate of 5.5 per 100 million vehicle miles traveled. Secretary Slater is convinced and determined that we can still do better.

## **Transportation is about people."**

- Rodney E. Slater, Secretary of Transportation

The following stories were told during the Nationwide Town Meeting with its teleconferencing link to Atlanta, Detroit, and San Francisco. These are the stories of Martha Rich, who appeared with Atlanta Mayor Bill Campbell; Barbara Butler in Detroit with Mayor Dennis Archer; and Pat Hines with Mayor Willie Brown of San Francisco.



**Via teleconferencing from Detroit, Barbara Butler told her story about how the use of a child safety seat saved the life of her infant daughter.**

## **Impact of Drugs and Alcohol**

In October 1996, Martha and Bill Rich lost their 19-year-old son, William Anton Rich, to a five-time DUI (driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol) offender and drug user. Inspired to do something for young people, Martha and Bill founded the W.A.R. Against Broken Hearts, a non-profit organization aimed at promoting awareness of the dangers of driving while impaired.

An occupational health nurse at Lockheed Martin, Martha took six months off from her job and borrowed \$50,000 to make and promote a 24-minute video with a message against driving under the influence of drugs and alcohol. The group received an additional grant of \$49,000 from the Georgia governor's Office on Highway Safety to be used to make more videos and fliers for high school classes around the state.

In March 1999 at the National Lifesavers Conference, Martha was honored with the Public Service Award of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

## **Child Safety Seats**

Barbara Butler is now a strong believer in Michigan's Child Safety Seat Law. Barbara initially felt the way many people do - taking the time to focus on the installation of child safety seats is not important. However, at the Children's Hospital in Detroit, where she gave birth to her daughter Ashley, she was required to learn about the proper installation of a child safety seat. Soon after her release from the hospital, she and Ashley were involved in two auto crashes in one month. Barbara now realizes that Ashley is alive today only because of the mandatory training provided by the hospital.

Barbara has gone on to become a "safety ambassador" in her community, and she provides advice and guidance to other families throughout the Detroit area about child safety seats.

## **Bicycle Helmets for Safety**

Pat Hines was a



**Following the town meeting, Heisman Trophy winner Ricky Williams posed with Secretary Slater and Federal Railroad Administrator Molitoris.**

competitive racing bike rider, but she did not wear a helmet while riding. In fact, she hated helmets and would not ride with anyone who wore one.

One day, she

and a friend were going on a ride, and when the friend started to put on a helmet, Pat convinced her to ride without the helmet. During the ride, while dodging automobile traffic, her friend crashed and died from a head injury.

This incident changed Pat's life forever. Since that time, she has devoted her life to safety education in her community. She has her own company, SAFE MOVES. SAFE MOVES educates children, parents, and the community on pedestrian, bicycle, motor vehicle, train, bus, and recreational safety. SAFE MOVES also conducts nationwide programs, including student and parent workshops, traffic simulation rodeos, community outreach campaigns, and data collection and evaluation related to safety issues.

### **Safety Is Our Priority**

The following corporate, association, and labor leaders were among the signees who pledged to work as partners to provide safe work environments, advocate safety in their organizations, provide safety education to employees, make safety a priority in organizational activities, and to be partners in the National Transportation Safety Action Plan.

Dr. Akhter, President American Public Health Assn.	James LaSala, President Amalgamated Transit Union	Prendergast, President MTA - Long Island Railroad
Thomas A. Allegretti, President American Waterways Operators	Timothy Lynch, President & CEO Motor Freight Carriers Association	Richard Shilling, Vice President Mobil Shipping & Transportation Co.
Pete Carpenter, President CSX Corporation	Dale Marisco, Executive Director Community Transportation Assn. of America	David Snyder, General Counsel American Insurance Association
Walter Coleman, President Regional Airline Association	Paul McCarthy, Executive Chairman Air Line Pilots Association	Otto Sonefeld, Program Director of Intermodal Activities AASHTO
John Collins, President ITS America	Walter McCormick, President & CEO American Trucking Associations	Captain Jack Sparks, President American Pilots Association
Jerry Davis, Vice Chairman Union Pacific Railroad	William Millar, President American Public Transit Association	Judith Stone, President Advocates for Highway & Auto Safety
Robert Dibblee, Sr. Vice President National Assn. of Independent Insurers	Clarence Monin, President Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers	George Warrington, President AMTRAK
Robert Frenzel, President	James Muldoon, Chairman	Ed Wytkind,

Airline Transportation Association	National Safety Boating Advisory Council	Executive Director AFL-CIO, TDD
Ed Hamberger, President Association of American Railroads	Karolyn Nunnallee, National President MADD	
James Kolstad, Vice President AAA	W. Dan Pickett, President Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen	

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