



# DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

# NEWS

## OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

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EXCERPTS OF REMARKS FOR DELIVERY BY U.S. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE BEFORE THE 17th REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON HIGHWAY SAFETY SPONSORED BY THE ONTARIO DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT, CHATEAU LAURIER HOTEL, OTTAWA, CANADA, FRIDAY, JANUARY 29, 1971, 12:30 P.M.

We are meeting in a province which has been a pioneer in modern highway transportation. One of the first concrete highways in the world was begun right here in Ontario between Toronto and Hamilton -- 61 years ago, way back in 1910.

I might note that was just about the time this Secretary of Transportation was born.

In both our countries, highway construction has built and shaped our economy, our social attitudes, our politics, our employment and educational opportunities.

Yet -- as this conference and series of workshops recognizes so well -- highways have also contributed to what could conservatively be called the greatest carnage of any civilian phenomenon in history.

Too many people want to leave their footprints in the sands of time and manage only to leave skid marks at the intersection instead.

Safety on the highways is the most serious environmental problem in transportation today.

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In the U.S. alone every year we kill off more than 55,000 productive citizens and injure almost 2 million more. The death toll over the last 70 years now exceeds 1,800,000 persons. The cost of these losses in economic terms alone is at least \$16 billion.

Here in the Dominion of Canada, 5,425 people met the grim reaper of the highways during calendar 1969. Nationwide, well over 100,000 were injured.

Surely there is no more familiar sound of violence on Canadian or U.S. streets today than the scream of sirens rushing to the scene of a car crash. It is the modern equivalent of the shoot-out in a Yukon saloon -- but more deadly. Deadlier even in its accumulated effects than the tragedies of war.

It is no wonder that Minister of Transport Jamieson predicted in Road International Magazine last September that automotive safety, especially in urban areas, will provide a major and continuing challenge during the 70's for Government officials and concerned members of the influential public.

Community leaders such as yourselves throughout Canada and the U.S. have already accepted that challenge. Now the job is to find out how we can maximize our effectiveness and our international cooperation in the long struggle ahead.

We can succeed. A few years ago progress was thought impossible. Now, suddenly, the prospects look much better. Our preliminary data indicate that about 1100 -- and perhaps as many as 1400 -- fewer people died on U.S. highways in 1970. That is the first drop in gross numbers since 1967, and the first really substantial decline since 1958.

Better still, early figures suggest that the U.S. accident rate for 1970 dropped from 5.6 percent to about five deaths per 100 million miles travelled. That is the fourth consecutive annual decline in the rate, and the sharpest drop in 12 years. It is the lowest rate in history.

All this in spite of increasing car registrations and miles driven. We actually drove five percent more miles last year while fatalities dropped 2.5 percent.

In Canada, the picture is equally encouraging. The Ontario Traffic Safety Bulletin for January 1971, states that for the first time since World War II, all categories of crashes are down. For the first six months of 1970, fatal collisions are down 5.7 percent and fatalities themselves dropped 6.5 percent. The largest decreases were recorded for Ontario, so again this Province is leading the way. But percentage reductions, though they show progress, do not really give me much comfort. We still are killing off our fellow citizens in my country at the rate of 150 every 24 hours.

It would be dishonest to claim these trends in the U.S. and Canada are any more than that. A great deal of hard work remains ahead of us.

The U.S. Government has developed a tripartite strategy to bring the epidemic of car crashes under control.

We focus on the road, the car, and the driver.

From 1964 through 1969, the U.S. Federal Government and the 50 states spent over one billion dollars for some 5900 projects to improve the most dangerous portions of streets and highways. The fabulous interstate system, of course, is already saving 5,000 lives per year and its only three-fourths finished.

Moreover, during the last four years our National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (formerly the National Highway Safety Bureau -- but now reporting directly to me) has set tough standards that are revolutionizing the safety of automobiles. Today, the buyer of a new car can drive out of the dealer's lot with greater confidence thanks to shatter-proof windshields, collapsible steering columns, improved handling and braking, better signals, interior padding, and safety belts.

Studies have shown that if the shoulder harnesses already installed in cars were always worn, 8 to 10 thousand lives per year could be saved.

However, we realize that you can't force people to buckle up so we are requiring that new cars be equipped with some sort of effective passive restraint system by July 1, 1973. The NATO pact members gave intensive examination to the possibilities in a conference in Detroit last June. We don't care whether the auto makers come up with an air bag or a safety blanket or what-have-you, as long as it's automatic, and it saves lives!

We are also asking for comments on a proposal that cars be equipped with a device that automatically turns on the horn and flasher lights if the vehicle exceeds 85 miles-per-hour.

We have devised tentative new standards for fire control inside cars, requiring that upholstery fabrics not burn at a rate of more than four inches per minute. We are pushing the development of new periscopic systems to improve rear vision. If the Germans could do it on U-boats in the 30's, we ought to be able to do it on cars in the 70's. We are insisting that Detroit use its engineering genius to develop an energy-absorbing bumper to save lives and property in low-speed collisions. I have seen the GM bumpers demonstrated and I'm delighted that 10 days ago Ford and GM announced that they would be prepared to introduce shock-absorbing bumpers by 1973. Chrysler is also working in this area.

We foresee hundreds of such improvements to be introduced in cooperation with automakers of all nations.

Perhaps most important, we are speeding research on a dozen experimental cars with safety built in from roof top to road line. Last June my Government awarded contracts totaling nearly 8 million dollars to Fairchild-Hiller, American Machine and Foundry and General Motors for design and construction of prototype experimental safety vehicles (E.S.V's) to be delivered in 1972 and 1973.

These cars will be 4,000 pound sedans equipped with low-emission engines and safety features designed to keep occupants alive in 50-mile-an-hour crashes and rollovers at 70 miles-an-hour.

Japan and Germany will develop comparable E.S.V's in the 2,000 pound class. Late last year, I flew to Bonn and Tokyo and signed agreements with the Ministers of Transport for Germany and Japan to get these projects underway at once.

We are looking forward to the consummation of similar arrangements with Italy, France, Great Britain and Sweden this coming spring.

But I don't intend to stop with just experimental vehicles. As of today, I am asking our National Highway Traffic Safety Administrator, Doug Toms, to get together with Doctor G. D. Campbell in the Canadian Traffic Safety Department and develop comprehensive traffic fatality reduction plans to benefit the drivers and pedestrians of both our nations. I think there is much we could do to coordinate our activities -- especially in the area of alcohol counter measures, accident reporting and accident surveillance.

It is ironical that unlike so many nations living side by side we kill each other only on the highway.

If the present trends continue and we work together I wouldn't be surprised to see a decrease of 10,000 in the highway death toll within two years. A high goal? Yes, but is is attainable.

Within seven years we could achieve a 50 percent reduction in fatality rates. By 1980, I predict cars will be so safe that it will be almost impossible to kill yourself in one at speeds under 60-miles-per-hour.

The big imponderable, of course, is the "little" matter of driver behavior.

As pace-setters in your Provinces, and local communities, I know you will agree with me that our efforts are doomed unless we do something about the habitually drunken driver.

Number one -- alcohol is implicated in 30,000 deaths and 800,000 injuries each year in the U.S. Number two -- problem drinkers, not social drinkers, cause two-thirds of these fatalities in the U.S. Number three -- and you may not believe this but it's true -- the seven percent of drivers who cause all this mayhem can be apprehended, and most certainly can be controlled -- if we work together on this problem that we share.

So let's go back home to our communities and weed out the drunks.

Mind you, I am not advocating a crusade against social drinking. We yanks tried that back in the 20's and it didn't work too well (although the Canadian economy didn't suffer, I'm told!) We are only after the license and the car of the fellow who is a professional drunk, a repeater, the fellow who can't stop, the fellow who cruises around the streets with .10 percent alcohol or more in his blood stream. As I said, these menaces represent only 2.5 percent of the driving public, but they cause at least 40 percent of the slaughter.

The vital thing to remember is that you people have the power -- as informed, dedicated citizens of a leading nation -- to tighten up licensing and push the enforcement of the laws against drunk driving. Only you, leading your communities, can do the job. Keep repeating the fact that last year twice as many North Americans died in car crashes where liquor was involved as were murdered. Tell the people that according to the Stanford Research Institute in California if just 20 percent of drivers lost their licenses, the accident rate would be chopped by 80 percent.

Will this effort pay off? Of course the British and Swedes have already proven that stiff control measures work. The habitual boozier over there is no butt of comedy in nightclub skits. He is a total pariah.

We still have a long way to go to get the death rate down to a civilized level, down to the lowest rate technology and fiscal commitment can achieve. But we are on our way. The final act in this all-time long-running tragedy must be written by Canada and the U.S., cooperating for their common benefit.

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