



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

NEWS

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REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY U.S. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE AT THE SIGNING OF THE EXPERIMENTAL SAFETY VEHICLE PROGRAM, TUESDAY, MAY 11, 1971, 11:30 a.m.

This day marks another major milestone in the attack upon a senseless tragedy of modern civilization -- the traffic death. The loss of hundreds of thousands of the world's most productive citizens -- its youth -- has made a mockery of the very word civilization. Today, three of the world's most industrialized nations represented here are saying "this tragedy of modern technology must be curbed."

Gentlemen, it will be curbed.

By better cars, yes. But not without better drivers and better roads. The problem demands -- and is getting -- an all-out comprehensive approach.

Our attention here today, however, is directed toward bringing better cars soon onto the highways of the world:

- Cars that will help drivers avoid having accidents.
- But cars that will also protect their occupants and pedestrians when accidents unfortunately, do happen.

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In the experimental safety vehicle program, we are calling upon the genius of innovative automotive engineering to show what can be done when safety is the uppermost goal -- not styling, or jack-rabbit starting or blinding speeds. We want attractive cars. We want high performance. But not at the price of hundreds of thousands dead, millions of human beings maimed, billions of dollars of property damage. In short, we want the benefits of technology without these tragic problems of its making.

To apply technology to social problems -- this is why NATO organized its committee on the challenges of modern society. We are proud that this initiative stems from a proposal by President Nixon during NATO's 20th Anniversary in April 1969 for this important quorum of the world's industrialized powers -- so successful in achieving cooperation in mutual problems of defense and security -- to broaden its attention toward environmental degradations of the world caused by technology.

NATO's C.C.M.S. is dedicated to one over-riding objective: high-level Government action to improve the quality of life of all mankind. And high level Government action is what we are witnessing today in vehicle design for safety.

Government involvement in this problem is long overdue, not because industry worldwide on its own has not made progress; but because it has not made enough progress -- not as long as hundreds of thousands continue to die on the world's highways.

Last year in our country we had 1,100 fewer deaths than the previous year, even while vehicle mileage rose 5 percent. I am convinced that much of this achievement can be traced to cars that became more safe under the thrust of Government action. Lacerative facial injuries are down some 50 percent due to laminated windshields such as called for by federal standards in place of conventional tempered glazing. Drivers impacting the energy absorbing steering columns are walking away uninjured from crashes that with the earlier steering columns would have speared them to death. There is no doubt that with new strong role of Government, lives are being saved. In the experimental safety vehicle program, instead of attacking problem on a piecemeal basis, a total systems approach is being adopted. Instead of keeping safety advances tightly under wraps within corporate and national boundaries a spirit of sharing and international cooperation prevails.

Our current E.S.V. program is limited to vehicles of roughly 4,000 pounds, a size we chose because it predominates on our roads. But we, as well as other nations, urgently need safety in smaller vehicles and, what's more, at a price that the working man can afford. Vehicle safety must never become a luxury item available only to the rich.

Today, the United Kingdom and the Government of Italy formally join the United States, and bring their well known skills in designing small cars into the ESV program. However, our engineers and officials have been working together informally for many months. I was particularly gratified that, without waiting for the final, formal agreements to be signed, the British and Italian governments were so well represented at our ESV conference this past January, graciously hosted by the French Government and its industry.

The agreements that we are signing here are the starting point for governments to provide the push and much financial support for ESV development. But it will be the innovative genius of our manufacturers that will transform the governmental initiative into working prototype vehicles. Metal is to be bent; plastics are to be shaped; engines are to be revved up. Gentlemen, this is not a paper and pencil exercise. This means automotive engineering manpower -- lots of it -- must work on ESV's.

However, engineering manpower is a critical problem confronting every automobile producer in the world today. Much of the heavy demands for engineering time arise simply from the tougher competition in the world automotive markets. But producers must also allocate major amounts of engineering manpower to respond to new or proposed safety as well as exhaust emission regulations. In the safety field alone, between the United States, the Common Market, and other countries, more than 50 different vehicle safety standards are in effect and work is in progress on some 200 additional regulations.

These are good regulations and, what's more, long overdue. As I pointed out, we already have conclusive evidence that they are paying off in lives saved and broken bodies averted.

However, each of these proposals places demands upon available engineering manpower in industry. Perhaps not too much in the case of some single proposal, but certainly a significant amount in the aggregate.

Apart from the heavy demands for manpower, we do not believe that increasing the number of standards, particularly as a series of add-ons, is the best way to design a safe car that can be sold at a price people can afford to pay. This will be more readily achieved by designing the vehicle from the ground up as a total system, which is the fundamental purpose of ESV developments.

I accordingly have directed Mr. Toms, the NHTSA Administrator, to reexamine all vehicle safety standards now under development and advise me by early Fall as to how at least some of this work can be redirected so as to be more compatible with the broad systems requirements called for in the ESV's.

Gentlemen, the ESV program is our top priority for getting the next generation of safety vehicles into the general market quickly. I am indeed grateful that we can count on the help of your governments in achieving this goal of such worldwide importance.