

COMMENTS BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION CLAUDE S. BRINEGAR  
AT CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF MOTOR VEHICLE  
ADMINISTRATORS, MIAMI BEACH, FLORIDA, SEPTEMBER 12, 1973.

It's a great personal pleasure to have this opportunity to participate in your 41st Annual International Conference. Since we are partners in a mission of enormous National importance--the mission of making highway travel safe and efficient--I know of no better way for partners to work together than face to face.

Let me say at the outset that the Department of Transportation is most impressed with the fine work that you motor vehicle administrators are doing. We in Washington

can develop plans and set goals. But it's you administrators, working in our cities and in our state houses, who are putting these plans into action and achieving those goals. You are the ones who are saving lives.

I also want to express my appreciation--and my admiration--for the high level of professional responsibility demonstrated by your Association. Your Equipment Approval Program, for example, will add to safety in our vehicles and deserves Nationwide acceptance. Your work with the American Medical Association in setting up a program for identifying physical or mental deficiencies in potential drivers is also commendable. I am impressed, also, by the Association's efforts to upgrade vehicle inspection and establish a Uniform Vehicle Identification Number.. Our department will be following these programs quite closely.

Since becoming Secretary, I have set before myself a number of significant objectives. High on the list is to find the means to significantly improve the safety of our Nation's highways. The reason for this objective is all too well-known: 57,000 persons killed--four million injured--a cost to our society of many billions of dollars.

My early months on the job <sup>have</sup> ~~been~~ impressed upon me the difficulty of making headway. The problem clearly goes beyond just establishing the proper laws. Each state has its own code of law. And there are thousands of roadside warnings and advisories. Yet it is evident from the 16 million accidents every year that far too many of our drivers are not obeying the laws and are not paying attention to our advisories and warnings. We learn, too, that for a variety of reasons many of these laws are not being adequately enforced--and lawbreakers are not adequately punished.

Other safety efforts also run into difficulties. We find, for example, that while most high schools have physical education as a compulsory course during the entire four years, driver education lasts but a few hours. But the biggest single danger to a young person's health and safety is clearly the family car. Safety is both a desirable and a difficult goal. I need your help, and I hope we can likewise help you.

To play a key role in our safety efforts I was delighted to be able to recruit Dr. James Gregory to serve as Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. I have known Jim Gregory, both personally

and professionally, for nearly 20 years, and I have the greatest respect for his research, technical, and administrative abilities. I am confident that he will bring fresh insights and approaches to our Nation's highway safety problems.

It is important to keep in mind that the tide is going our way--we are saving lives. We now have safer vehicles, safer roads, and improved State and community traffic safety programs. They are achieving results. If the fatality curve that prevailed in the years before the passage of our Safety Acts in 1966 had continued unchecked, we would now have 50,000 more persons in our cemeteries.

But if the fatality rate is decreasing, the actual number of persons killed grows a little every year. The reason for this--the tremendous annual increase in highway mileage--is, of course, obvious. You see the registrations increase each year and you see the thousands of new drivers entering the fold. Total figures from all the states show that every day we add some 12,000 more cars to our highways; every day we grant licenses to about 10,000 more drivers. Every day, in other words, we must work harder to keep from slipping behind.

Yet in spite of this steady growth, I believe we shall soon be seeing a decrease in the actual number of fatalities. We expect seat belts and shoulder harnesses will be saving more lives every year. At present, seat belts are available for 9 out of 10 passenger cars. Yet they are being used less than a quarter of the time. Despite this low usage, we estimate that they are saving more than 3,000 lives a year. With arrival this month of the new 1974 cars with their interlock systems, we expect usage--and some tempers--to increase markedly. If total usage can be pushed up to the high percentages we could quickly see a 10,000-15,000 reduction in traffic deaths. No other single event could so quickly save these lives. It is for this reason that we are supporting State efforts to enact mandatory seat belt laws.

I think it's worth noting that private car driver and occupant fatalities are actually showing a slight drop. It is the increasing pedestrian, truck, bicycle and motor cycle deaths that are pushing the total up.

We are watching very closely the development work on the air cushion. There are still legal questions on the

test standards that must be resolved but we can move further. We shall learn as we go. General Motors has announced plans to install air cushion systems in 50,000-100,000 of their full-size 1974 cars. This program is most welcome and should yield valuable additional experience. We plan to follow the results very carefully.

We are hopeful, too, in seeing progress in reducing fatalities involving alcohol. It's shocking to say, on the one hand, that excessive drinking is involved in half of all highway fatalities, and, on the other, that we know so little about how to stop it. Two years of experience in operating a limited number of Alcohol Safety Action Projects is giving us some encouragement. Mr. James Wilson, Acting Deputy Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, will be telling you about some of the details tomorrow. We know that, in the experimental areas, the drinking driver can be found and he can be taken from his car--beforehand. What we don't know yet is how to do this on an effective National basis.

We are particularly concerned with the heavy drinker--the problem drinker. Sooner or later, he is likely to be

involved in a highway accident. But the fact is that these problem drinkers are generally known in their communities before they are involved in crashes. A study in Oakland, California, for example, indicated that two-thirds of a group of drinking drivers responsible for crashes were known to social agencies for drinking problems prior to the time of their accidents. A saddening statistic is that the highest proportion of alcohol-involved crashes occurs in the age group between 21 and 24. It is the young problem-drinker driver, one who may not yet exhibit the symptoms of alcoholism, who is most involved in fatal crashes.

The solution to the problem of the drinking driver is elusive but clearly the answers must be found.

Highway safety gets major attention in the new Federal Aid Highway Act of 1973, which President Nixon signed into law last month. The Act calls for a three-year, \$23 billion highway and mass transportation construction program. For the first time, it permits our urban planners to use flexibility and common sense in deciding how best to use urban highway dollars.

The funding for the Section 402 highway safety program is as follows: \$100 million for the current fiscal year;

\$125 million for next; and \$150 million for the third year. Those 402 programs administered by the Federal Highway Administration were granted an additional \$90 million. In addition the Act provides for incentive grants for states where seat belts <sup>laws</sup> are enacted and for those states which demonstrate significant progress in reducing fatalities. We expect to use these "carrots" with good results.

The new law also calls for a series of safety studies. It asks the Department of Transportation to evaluate the various techniques of driver education; to study the connection between the use of drugs and highway accidents. We are also going to look into ways of getting citizens groups involved in highway safety and into ways of using mass media for safety education. We are also asked to study the value of a National center for statistical analysis of highway operations.

Unfortunately, there is one section in the bill that we cannot endorse. Section 229 transfers from the Department of Transportation to the Congress final authority for promulgating 402 standards. The section specified that any new standards or revisions to existing standards may not be enacted without enabling legislation approved by the Congress.



We believe that this action places in jeopardy our ability to manage our safety programs. We hope it will be changed.

The new Federal Highway Act also provides for six separate highway construction programs directed specifically at safety. They include construction involving highway-railroad grade crossings; bridge replacements; high hazard locations; roadside obstacle elimination; pavement marking and safer road demonstrations. For these programs, more than \$1 billion is authorized over the three year program.

A major event in our department was the recent announcement that we are for the first time setting Federal safety standards for vehicles in use. These standards concentrate on the critical areas of braking, steering, suspension, tires and wheels.

This new action is based on a study that indicated that about six percent of accidents are caused by mechanical failures from wear and degradation. And it's possible that an additional 10 or so percent probably had similar causes. Further analysis showed that 80 percent of all the accidents involved the specific components named in the new standards. Clearly, we need to do something to see that they are maintained properly.

The standards will become effective in October and will be implemented by state vehicle inspection programs. Let me emphasize that they are minimum standards. We do not intend them to replace any state inspection procedures that might be more comprehensive or more stringent.

Our department's research and development program received a safety bonus when the first of nine new quiet trucks went into service early last month. We have been working with three major truck manufacturers to reduce truck noise. The work, centering around tires, mufflers, exhausts, and transmissions, is quite encouraging. Exterior and in-cab noise levels were reduced by one half. Mid-America Lines of Kansas City now has the first one in service. We shall watch these nine trucks in a million mile evaluation test. I suggest you keep an ear cocked for them on the highway. Hopefully, you will be impressed by what you don't hear.

I'd like to take a moment to thank the members of the California State Highway Patrol--my home state--for their fine work in training 245 State, Federal and industry officials in highway noise enforcement. Commissioner Pudinski

and key members of the patrol held classes in Sacramento in a training program designed to help in the development of uniform highway noise regulations. Under the noise control act of 1972, state and local officials are responsible for enforcing motor carrier noise regulations applicable to within-state commerce. Our department is responsible for similar regulations affecting interstate commerce.

Perhaps some of you here today attended the Sacramento sessions. In all, 47 states were represented. Some received administrative training designed to help set up vehicle noise control ordinances and legislation. Others attended technical sessions designed to prepare them for training local enforcement personnel. We consider this a most valuable program.

I believe that one of our better safety programs-- and the credit goes largely to you motor vehicle administrators-- is our National Driver Register. On a typical day we are now getting about 70,000 inquiries and about 5,000 reports of license revocations, suspensions or denials. I'm told that about 1% of the inquiries result in probable "matches."

Again, I congratulate you for working together to keep unsafe drivers off the road. And if you know of ways to improve the Register and our services to you, please let us know. Meanwhile, if I may use an old phrase, just keep those cards and letters coming in.

We expect, in the long run, to realize substantial safety development as a result of the new Motor Vehicle Information and Cost Savings Act. This new legislation is designed, in part, to encourage competition among motor vehicle manufacturers in the design and production of safe motor vehicles.

One section of this new Federal law prohibits anyone from tampering with an odometer. It also provides that anyone cheated buying a motor vehicle because of a false odometer reading, may sue for three times the damages suffered, or \$1500--whichever is greater.

Another provision requires us to set bumper standards for passenger cars so that these bumpers will be capable of withstanding low-speed collisions.

We shall also be establishing between 5 and 10 diagnostic centers to help prove out new techniques and to demonstrate their value in cutting down repair bills.

The provision that will have the greatest overall impact, however, is likely to be the Automobile Consumer Information Study. This requires us to prepare, and make public, a comprehensive consumer information study which will contain an evaluation of each model of car according to (1) its damage susceptibility, (2) its crashworthiness, and (3) its ease of diagnosis and repair. A third provision requires that in early 1975, auto dealers must make available to prospective purchasers the comparative insurance costs of various makes and models. Clearly, it is going to become increasingly profitable to design a safe car. Safety is going to pay off in profits.

We want to help these designers who are looking to safety and we are hopeful that our work in sponsoring experimental safety vehicles will be useful. As you know, four American companies constructed four different cars which were tested and evaluated. On the positive side I can say we were greatly impressed by their structural integrity which showed good crash survivability at 50 miles per hour. We feel that the restraint systems need more work, and all four cars--like a lot of Americans--were overweight. Our target weight was 4,000 pounds; the lightest test vehicle weighed 5,000 pounds.

The department is now developing a new research safety vehicle program aimed at the car in the 3,000 pound class, and possibly even less. We hope that such a research car will provide major inputs for development of safety standards applicable in the 1980's. This new lighter weight, smaller size vehicle is designed to correspond to the smaller autos that must emerge in the energy-deficient era that lies before us.

It's regrettable, but true, that we must learn to live with fuel shortages and increased fuel costs. I suspect that the fuel shortage, combined with urban congestion, environmental restrictions and increasing costs are going to cause real changes in commuting and personal driving habits. Most particularly I would expect to see movement away from the one man-one car situation. We may also see strong pressures to reduce driving speeds to save gasoline. We may not like these options, but the alternatives could be far more unpleasant.

Finally, let me say that despite the difficulties of licking the safety problem, I am optimistic about the long-term outcome. The fact that we're at last all working

on it is in itself good news. We shall probably make no big breakthroughs, but we can constantly chip away. It will be discouraging at times. All the world knows when safety fails; but no one knows how often safety succeeds. But we can show results in small ways. I am impressed that our joint FARE program--Fatal Accident Reduction Enforcement--seems to be showing good results. It appears that even at this early date the success of the program in only one or two states is sufficient to justify the \$10 million cost of the whole program.

And so I support the power of your convention theme-- "Mission Possible." I believe it is possible and I look forward to working with you to help make it a reality.

Thank you.

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