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AMERICAN COALITION FOR TRAFFIC SAFETY  
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Thank you for the introduction, and thank you for inviting me.

I am quite pleased with the support ACTS and the auto industry gives to saving lives, preventing serious injuries on our highways.

This is my maiden appearance before a safety organization, but it's not my first safety speech. I gave that when I testified before Congress at my confirmation hearings. In fact, I don't think a day goes by that I don't talk about safety.

As you probably know, I'm just completing my first month as the President's Secretary of Transportation.

Many people have asked why I told the Senate that safety was my top priority, along with creating jobs. My emphasis on safety is based on a very simple proposition: People will not use a transportation system in which they have no confidence. People will not use a transportation system that is not safe. And since highway crashes cause more deaths and injuries than accidents in any other transportation mode, our efforts to improve highway safety take on added importance.

Don't get me wrong. I believe our highways are the world's safest, and the record proves that our safety programs work. The national traffic death toll for 1991 is estimated at a little over 41,000; that's the lowest figure in 30 years, even though the number of vehicles on our roads, and miles traveled, have more than doubled. That's impressive, and you deserve much of the credit. But you and I know our work is far from over.

I am delighted the President chose me to head the best agency in government. I also happen to think that right now, it's probably the most important agency in government. In part, that's because we're busy implementing a revolutionary new surface transportation act that the President signed into law last December -- we call it by its acronym, ISTEA.

That new law provides for the investment of nearly \$21 billion this year in our nation's surface transportation infrastructure, including safety programs. Much of that money is already at work today supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs, and that's important as we get our economy moving again.



I'm especially pleased to report that the dollars authorized by ISTEA for highway safety programs are at work, saving lives. Nearly 94 percent of the available funds for our main highway safety programs have been obligated, well ahead of last year's pace. The sooner we can put those dollars to work, the more lives we can save.

The new law is revolutionary because it reorders federal priorities in transportation. It provides unprecedented flexibility for state and local governments on how they invest federal dollars. It's sensitive to the environment. And of special importance to you and me, it reinforces and promotes safety as a top priority. ISTEA authorizes 35 percent more money for highway safety grant programs.

ISTEA will save more lives on our highways. It pursues three agendas: One, to maintain and expand our highway system. Safe highways, well designed and properly maintained are an essential first component of safety. Two, to make our vehicles safer, and three, to provide incentives to states to adopt and enforce tougher laws and promote safety on their own.

You may recognize that agenda as the traditional triad of safety that has guided ACTS, the automobile industry and other safety groups for years.

Many of ISTEA's safety provisions were in progress before the law was enacted. The safety community, including NHTSA, led the charge for these gains: a jump in safety belt usage, belt laws in most states and child safety seat laws in all states, progress against drunk driving. You deserve the credit for a job well done. Nevertheless, we need all the help we can get and ISTEA gives us the muscle to make more gains.

I'm delighted to report that full frontal air bags, thanks to their popularity and growing acceptance by consumers, may become available in nearly all passenger cars, light trucks and vans by the 1995 model year. DOT's regulatory decisions to encourage airbags and the auto industry's selection of this technology were forerunners. Now ISTEA makes it the law.

What that means is front seat passengers will have the best protection yet devised -- air bag and lap-shoulder belts. We should see front seat crash deaths cut by half. I should also mention that the new law requires us to establish better interior protection for the head, and we're working on that right now.



ISTEA also asks us to take a hard look at requiring other features, too, like anti-lock brakes; increased side-crash protection for light trucks and vans; child seat improvements, and rollover protection. We have been working on many of those projects for some time, and ISTEA creates a new momentum for our efforts.

Now, I know some of you may be concerned about the impact of the President's 90-day regulatory moratorium on our safety programs. Yes, we are currently reviewing all of our existing rules and regulations for their impact on the economy. We're also receiving and reviewing comments from the public on our regulations. We are on the lookout for rules that should either be rescinded, revised, or revisited because of their negative impact on the economy. The moratorium doesn't apply to congressionally-mandated rules.

But let me assure you that we will not compromise safety one iota. In fact, it was the President's concern over safety that led him to announce recently that on-board cannisters to trap refueling vapor would not be required on vehicles in order to comply with the Clean Air Act. Instead, vapor recovery systems will be required at filling stations.

Let me get back to ISTEA for a moment and talk about highway safety programs.

The importance placed on highway safety is demonstrated by the fact that the legislation reserves ten percent of all surface transportation program funds for highway related safety improvements. It also provides for improved highway safety management and an expanded motor carrier safety program.

ISTEA reaffirmed the value of the federal safety grants program, and introduced new incentives to encourage universal adoption of safety belt and helmet use laws.

Grants to combat impaired driving are now available to states that have a minimum number of basic remedies in place -- such as police roadside checkpoints and swift suspension of the driver's license for an alcohol-related offense.

States with these remedies in place can then tap an additional series of 5 percent supplemental bonus grants. Lower blood alcohol levels, and confiscation of license plates of repeat offenders can bring bonus grants.



Both motorcycle helmet and safety belt use should expand from a similar incentive program. Laws requiring belt and helmet use open the door to states for a basic grant. Then, higher use of belts and helmets in ensuing years will make the states eligible for additional dollars.

An important footnote here: We can look to substantially increased safety belt use nationwide this year as we further promote the "70% by '92" goal established by President Bush. My department is cooperating with states, cities, counties and -- in fact -- the entire highway safety community -- to make this a common effort. The most reassuring element of this campaign is cooperation. Private individuals and groups across the nation working for a common good.

The cause of traffic safety could not have come so far without ACTS. And I want you, Phil Haseltine and all ACTS members everywhere to know that you have made a difference -- an important difference.

In closing, here's what I think the ISTEA does for highway safety: First, it sends a clear message of support for programs that work well. I mean grants and incentives, as well as the many federally initiated ventures that bring business, industry and others into the highway safety arena.

And the act also emphasizes the importance of serious consideration of proposed changes in passenger vehicles. No change should be poorly researched. Change must be based upon this common sense test: Is the prospective gain worth the projected cost?

Regulation ought to take its cue from Thomas Edison. While Edison was working on a new storage battery, he tried experiment after experiment. Something like 50,000 tests -- before he got his answer. During the course of his work he was criticized for experiencing so many failures.

"No," said Edison, "I got results. I know 50,000 things that won't work."

That's our goal: Be relentless in support of safety. But never saddle the industry or the public with something that won't work. A proposal must be effective, and it must be practical. If it meets that test, we'll support it. That's a reasonable operating principle. We'll stand by it.

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