



Office of the Secretary

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REMARKS BY ALAN S. BOYD,
UNDER SECRETARY OF COMMERCE FOR TRANSPORTATION,
TO SAFETY ASSOCIATIONS' REPRESENTATIVES,
1 p.m., DECEMBER 6, 1966

It is a pleasure to welcome you to Washington and to invite your active participation in a meeting which I hope will be profitable both for you and for us in the Federal Government.

Your presence here is evidence of your concern over the appalling reality of death destruction on our Nation's highways, a tragedy from which no State, no county, city or town, is immune.

Your concern and your interest are most appreciated by your Federal Government. The diversity of talent and the extent of competence which you represent comprise a great resource which we are anxious to enlist in the new national effort to reduce traffic accidents and their consequences in death, injury, and property damage.

Your initiative, your assistance and your cooperation can make a vital contribution to this effort.

It has been said that the Highway Safety Act of 1966, which deals with Federal support of State and community traffic safety programs, and the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966, which deals with Federal vehicle standards, signal a new era in traffic safety. By the same token, our meeting today opens a dialogue that will be carried

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on for many years -- a dialogue that will produce action that will produce increasingly safer highway travel for all our citizens.

I know you are eager to enter into this dialogue and to take action. We share your eagerness and we appreciate your desire to get the information and the guidance you need to begin working on your programs.

The presentation we have prepared for today represents the best efforts of Dr. Haddon and his associates over the busy 12 weeks that have elapsed since the signing of the safety laws. They will review the legislation, discuss funding, organization and administration, and give you as much guidance as they can on performance standards.

We want to give you all the information we can, and we want you to give us your thoughts and your comments, because only through a mutual exchange can this program work effectively. We realize, however, that we don't have all the answers, but even questions we can't answer will be helpful to us.

You should not feel, however, that you need to wait for all the answers before you proceed in your own fields of interest. If you wish to participate, I would urge you to move ahead wherever you can to fit your activities into this developing program. I hope this meeting will help you get started.

But before you get into that discussion, I would like to offer a few general observations about the highway safety program.

First, it should be perfectly clear that the highway safety program must be a cooperative effort if it is to succeed at all.

This theme is emphasized by the legislative history of the Highway Safety Act of 1966, which shows that President Johnson and Congress recognized that greater safety could best be achieved by extending responsibility to all who could contribute to this cause. Accordingly, the Act recognizes the responsibility of the Federal Government to give leadership and coordination to a national safety effort. It recognizes the primary and historic responsibility of the States and their subdivisions for the safe use of their roads and streets. And it recognizes the important role that the private sector must play in a truly effective safety program and anticipates important contributions by industry, universities and foundations, and private associations.

The national highway safety program, then, is not a Federal program but a national program, bringing together the many resources of all levels of government and of the private economy in a cooperative, comprehensive, balanced attack against one of the gravest threats to life and limb in the Twentieth Century.

It is significant that the Highway Safety Act had its genesis in Federal-aid highway legislation, and specifically in an amendment written last year by the House Public Works Committee. This Committee, as you know, is intimately familiar with the operation of the Federal-aid highway program, and with its long history as a model of Federal-State cooperation. It was out of this experience with highways that Congress and the Administration fashioned the Federal-aid safety program, and we want to see it also develop as a model of governmental cooperation.

This leads me to my second observation, that cooperation requires respect for diversity, for legitimate differences between regions, States and localities.

In setting uniform national standards we don't want, any more than you, to require everyone to do everything the same way. We want to leave ample latitude for local initiative and adaptability as the most favorable climate for a creative and effective approach. Each State should tailor its program to its own make-up and character. It is in the best position to take account of its geography, its economy, its people, to identify its strengths and weaknesses, and frame its program accordingly.

At the same time, we must keep in mind that the traffic accident problem is no respecter of political boundaries and that the ultimate goal of all our programs is to save people from death and injury -- whether these people are natives of our town or travelers from a distant State. What really matters is how well we meet this objective, rather than how we go about it.

That is why the law calls for performance standards for State programs. It does not say, for instance, that the Federal Government should set a uniform national speed limit. Obviously, the conditions that determine the safe speed on the Boston Post Road are not the same as those prevailing on Interstate 40 in Arizona. What the law requires is that performance standards be established through which State regulations will promote safe driving under the conditions confronting the driver in each State.

My third point, and a most challenging one to the States and local communities, is that the purpose of the Highway Safety Act is to promote the development of new countermeasures against accidents and their end results. In authorizing Federal-aid funds, Congress specifically intended that this money be used to initiate new action, and not simply to share in the cost of existing programs.

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These funds have been referred to as "start-up" or "seed" money. As you are fully, and perhaps painfully, aware the Federal funds are not intended to cover all the costs of the expanded effort, and we appreciate the financial burdens the States are being called upon to accept. The Federal funds, however, are a start in the right direction and will help improve both the quality and quantity of the States' response to the traffic accident problem. And, as you know, we are to report to Congress in 1968 with our recommendations for the continued financing of State and local programs.

These three points -- the cooperative effort, local adaptability and initiative within national performance standards, and the accent on new programs -- all tend to focus on my final observation. In the words of the poet, "A man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?"

I earnestly hope that, as all of us go about the task of putting this safety program into action, our reach will exceed our grasp. To bring that thought right down to earth, no matter how well we are doing today, we must do better, and we must do better in every area of traffic safety. We must, in fact, set our goals beyond our reach.

To be blunt, the legislation enacted by Congress, after months of careful study and deliberation, certainly cannot be regarded as a vote of confidence in existing safety activities.

We need to take a critical look at all these activities and find out what must be done to strengthen them -- not how we can get by with the least sacrifice, inconvenience, or disruption of the status quo.

We must be ready to innovate, to accept scientifically-based information and adapt it rapidly to existing or new programs.

We will, of course, continue working in many of the areas, we are today -- in driver education, licensing, vehicle inspection, policing, traffic control, highway improvement, emergency services -- and so on. The real test will be how well we are doing in these areas.

As the program develops over the next few years we ought to be able to evaluate the various activities better than we are able to now. We should be able to check their effectiveness -- to spot promising innovations, to exchange information on productive techniques and methods, as you develop them.

This is your opportunity and your challenge. This is where all our efforts merge, because the real thrust of the cooperative national highway safety program is to produce the best results for the resources devoted to it.

Let us aim to get the most out of every safety activity. This is what the American people are asking of us -- this is the least we should ask of ourselves!