

Remarks prepared for
Ronald Medford, Deputy Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
For
The Decade of Action for Road Safety
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Thank you very much for inviting me here today to talk about roadway safety. I would like to applaud the UNECE for its very active involvement in the Decade of Action Plan and acknowledge Eva Molnar for putting together today's event.

At the United States Department of Transportation, our core mission is to help Americans move safely from one place to another. Crashes can happen in the blink of an eye and have devastating, long-term consequences. So our solemn obligation – the responsibility with which the American people have entrusted us – is to help prevent those crashes. Speaking on behalf of President Barack Obama, Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, and National Highway Traffic Safety Administrator David Strickland, I can assure you we do not take that trust lightly.

Our work to keep the motoring public safe requires a comprehensive effort that includes strong traffic safety laws, safer vehicle design, safer roads, and safer bridges. It is an interconnected effort that can, over time, develop and evolve

a national traffic safety culture. Today, in Washington, D.C., and here in New York, we are pleased to join with governments, international organizations and civil society organizations from around the world as we launch the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011-2020.

Much of the progress we have made is predicated squarely on the safety partnerships the Department has established and maintained over the years, both with other federal agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and the Office of National Drug Control Policy, state transportation officials, and with safety organizations. We could not have made progress without them.

And within the Department of Transportation, NHTSA is joined by our sister administrations, the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Motor Carriers Safety Administration who share our commitment to roadway safety.

From regulating commercial operators to building better infrastructure, our partnership with these two agencies is a logical extension of our work. For example, we are extremely encouraged by \$1.27 billion in ARRA funds that were specifically directed toward improving safety, including the building of hundreds of miles of rumble strips and cable median barriers.

However, this is just the tip of the iceberg. All highway projects built with federal highway funds have been designed according to the latest safety standards, with many including wider shoulders, newer and more effective guardrails, and bike and pedestrian facilities.

The latest numbers from our NHTSA data programs tell us we're on target with our programs. The numbers are trending downward, and we are moving aggressively to keep them headed in that direction. But nearly 33,000 people killed in one year is a national health problem and we will use every tool at our disposal to keep saving lives.

Our data shows that the vast majority of crashes occur because of dangerous behavior, including, driving drunk, driving while distracted, and driving too fast. We are hopeful that, along with efforts to build upon our successful safety programs, we can harness technology to help mitigate the effects of risky behavior.

We believe we're on the threshold of a new safety era that will revolve around safe vehicle designs and emerging technologies. Crash avoidance technologies provide an opportunity to save lives and reduce injuries by preventing crashes from occurring in the first place. Some of these technologies include vehicle-to-vehicle communication, as well as vehicle-to-infrastructure communication. We believe vehicle-to-vehicle safety applications could address 80 percent of crash scenarios involving non-impaired drivers.

Let's look at Distracted Driving, for example. Mobile electronic devices have become an integral part of our daily lives. It seems we demand to be connected at all times, and

seemingly at all costs. Under Secretary LaHood’s leadership, we are working to educate the public about safety and distraction behind the wheel of a vehicle.

We are extremely encouraged by the “no texting while driving” UN Road Safety guidance document produced by the UN Road Safety Collaboration and World Health Organization. We applaud UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon for instituting the “no texting while driving directive” for UN agency employees, contractors, etc.

NHTSA’s decades of experience with seat belts and drunk driving has taught us we must raise public awareness, enact tough laws, and step up enforcement to improve and sustain safety performance. We are also leading by example.

In addition to reaching out to drivers, NHTSA is developing an evaluative framework for in-car technologies. We are taking a hard look at these systems and we have challenged the auto industry and the cell phone industry to work

collaboratively with us to keep the driver focused on their required task: driving.

Designing a safer vehicle is just one component of the complete safety picture. Drivers and other road users must take an active role in their own safety. Vehicle occupants need to buckle up and keep focused on the task of driving. Technologies may be able to detect the presence of vulnerable road users, but both they and the vehicle drivers need to be on the lookout for each other.

Rapid motorization across the globe, particularly in developing countries, will be accompanied by a toll on human life and the need to implement safety standards and traffic safety programs to reduce that toll. We applaud and support all our international safety partners for enlisting in this important initiative for global road safety.