



**ADVOCATES  
FOR HIGHWAY  
& AUTO SAFETY**

**STATEMENT OF  
Cathy Chase, President  
Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety  
at Press Conference on the Surface Transportation Investment Act of 2021  
June 15, 2021**

Over the last year and half, the pandemic upended any sense of normalcy. This included on our roadways, as was recently confirmed by preliminary motor vehicle crash figures for 2020 from the U.S. Department of Transportation. Although our roads were emptier, crash fatalities went up. 38,680 people were killed on our roadways. This is a 7 percent increase from 2019 and the largest projected number of traffic fatalities since 2007. The main causes for this uptick were people driving while impaired, drivers speeding, and motorists not wearing their seat belts. These factors created a “perfect storm” for causing preventable deaths on our roadways at a time when first responders and health care workers were already pushed beyond their limits. It also meant grief and hardship for more families at a time when many were already suffering from mental and physical health challenges, as well as financial adversities.

We were compelled to hold this event today because all of these issues are solveable problems. What is needed is leadership to advance proven solutions.

Tomorrow, the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee will hold a very important hearing on its bill called, the Surface Transportation Investment Act of 2021, or S. 2016. While the legislation includes some improvements, it does not meet the moment. It does not include numerous advances – which have been proven to make our roads safer for all road users – including requiring automatic emergency braking, or AEB, for all new cars and trucks by a date certain. This technology would mitigate or prevent crashes caused by many of the dangerous and deadly behaviors on our roads – distracted driving, drunk driving, drugged driving, and drowsy driving by car and truck drivers. The Insurance Institute for Highway

Safety, or IIHS, has demonstrated forward collision warning with autobrake could reduce front-to-rear car crashes by 50 percent and front-to-rear large truck crashes by 40 percent. Additionally, the National Transportation Safety Board, or NTSB, has called for the technology to be in all vehicles.

Yet, this and other safety requirements for cars and trucks landed on the Committee's cutting room floor. Members of the auto industry upcharge for safety tech – placing the safest brakes and other safety systems outside the budgets of many families. And segments of the trucking industry don't want to pay for relatively small price increases to equip new small-to-medium sized trucks with the safest brakes. The Senate Commerce Committee could right this wrong tomorrow.

Worse yet, current, long-standing safety protections are under attack. Federal law wisely requires a minimum age of 21 for interstate truck drivers. Yet segments of the trucking industry want to address the self-inflicted driver retention issue by pulling teens from high school hallways to put them on high speed interstate highways. Another special interest carve-out is for haulers of livestock and agricultural commodities who already have an exemption from complying with the hours-of-service rules that govern driving hours under certain conditions. Expanding this exemption to illogical lengths will further exacerbate the deadly epidemic of driver fatigue. Plain and simple, these must be rejected or all road users will be further endangered.

We created a Safety Spotlight chart which conveys our opposition to these safety threats and support for needed improvements. Nearly 20 consumer, disability rights, traffic safety, bicyclist, public health, and child safety stakeholders join us in this effort, and the chart can be found on our website, [saferoads.org](http://saferoads.org).

In addition to action in the Senate, in the next couple of weeks, the U.S. House of Representatives will be debating and voting on its 5-year transportation bill which also has some safety improvements but falls short of what is needed to significantly reduce crashes. We are

continuing to urge all members of the House of Representatives to step up and advance proven solutions.

Today's speakers will be calling on Congress to not just talk the talk and say that safety is its number one priority, but rather to walk the walk and legislate for commonsense, needed safety improvements to stop the tens of thousands of needless deaths and millions of needless injuries from preventable crashes happening year after year on our roads.

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