

May 1, 2024

The Honorable Patty Murray, Chair
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins, Vice Chair
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Brian Schatz, Chair
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and
Urban Development, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Cindy Hyde-Smith, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and
Urban Development, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Murray, Vice Chair Collins, Chair Schatz, and Ranking Member Hyde-Smith:

Thank you for holding tomorrow's important hearing to consider the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Budget for the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT). Eliminating the preventable physical, emotional, and economic toll of motor vehicle crashes is a commitment shared by our organizations. To accomplish this safety priority, adequate resources, including funds and staff, for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA, "Agency") are vital to achieving this goal. We respectfully request that this letter be included in the hearing record.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), traffic fatalities and injuries remain at historically high levels; 42,514 people were killed, and 2.38 million people were injured in traffic crashes in 2022.ⁱ The number of traffic crashes was 5.93 million in 2022.ⁱⁱ Road users outside the vehicle experienced upturns in deaths. Pedestrian fatalities increased in 2022 marking the highest number of pedestrians killed in traffic crashes since 1981 (7,522 pedestrians killed), and bicyclist deaths were up 13 percent with the inclusion of motorized bicycle safety data (1,105 bicyclists killed).ⁱⁱⁱ Notably injuries for both nonoccupant groups increased by 11 percent.^{iv} Additionally, in 2022, nearly 6,000 people were killed in crashes involving a large truck.^v Since 2009, the number of fatalities in large truck involved crashes has increased by 76 percent.^{vi} More than 160,600 people were injured in crashes involving a large truck in 2022, a nearly four percent increase over 2021.^{vii} Early estimates find that traffic fatalities remained above 40,000 in 2023 as well.^{viii}

Roadway crashes also impose a tremendous cost burden on society. In 2019, crashes, injuries, and fatalities imposed a financial burden of nearly \$1.4 trillion in total costs to society -- \$340 billion of which are direct economic costs, equivalent to a "crash tax" of \$1,035 on every person living in the U.S.^{ix} In 2018, crashes alone cost employers \$72.2 billion.^x When adjusted solely for inflation, the amount is more than \$87 billion in 2023. Sufficient funding and resources for NHTSA can be the catalyst for implementing effective safety countermeasures to prevent crashes, save lives, reduce injuries, and contain costs.

While traffic fatalities continue to be a public health crisis, the funding for NHTSA's lifesaving mission has fallen woefully short for more than four decades as costs and statutory responsibilities have increased. While 95 percent of transportation-related fatalities involve motor vehicles, NHTSA historically receives only one percent of the overall U.S. DOT budget.^{xi} Despite persistently high crash deaths and injuries, increasingly complex vehicle technology and related issues, consistently high numbers of vehicle safety recalls, overdue motor vehicle and motor carrier safety rules mandated by

Congress, and more requirements, the NHTSA’s actual spending for vehicle safety programs has dramatically declined based on inflation, as illustrated by the chart below.

For Over 40 Years NHTSA’s Vehicle Safety Budget Shrinks While Program Needs Escalate: Comparison of NHTSA’s Safety Budget 1977 vs. 2024^{xii, xiii}

Account	Appropriations (millions)			Change in Spending Power	Percent Change
	1977	1977 (\$2024)	2024		
Vehicle Safety	\$72	\$380	\$110	-\$270	-71%
State & Community Grants	\$89	\$469	\$795	\$326	70%

The above table clearly demonstrates the disparity in funding for vehicle safety which should be increased at a rate commensurate with State and Community Grant funding.

Count (millions)	1977	2021	Change in Count	Percent Change
Licensed Drivers	138	233	+95	69%
Vehicle Registrations	135	303	+168	124%

We were pleased that the recently enacted Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024 (Pub. L. 118-42) fully funded the safety improvements in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA, Pub. L. 117-58). Further, we are encouraged by the Administration’s FY 2025 budget proposal for the U.S. DOT which provides an \$82.6 million increase in funding for NHTSA.^{xiv} This boost will help the agency address the shortfall in spending power detailed in the chart above and serve as a good “down payment” on the Agency’s work related to vehicle safety rulemaking, enforcement, research and analysis which has a high payoff.

As we reach the halfway point between the enactment of the IIJA and the end of its five-year span, a majority of the directives to NHTSA to establish performance standards for critical vehicle safety technology are overdue or unfulfilled. Moreover, the Agency is responsible for a range of initiatives aimed at reducing risky driving decisions such as speeding, and distracted, drunk, drugged, and drowsy driving, improving occupant protection, and bolstering the safety of vulnerable road users, among others. The Section 402 Highway Safety Program and Section 405 National Priority Safety Program, in combination with state adoption of essential traffic safety laws, can assist these ongoing efforts. Additionally, the Agency’s Operations and Research (O&R) budget is crucial to important activities related to data collection, consumer information, and identification of vehicle safety defects. All these safety objectives can and should be realized by an adequately funded budget.

Our nation is at a transformative time in transportation with the rapid development and deployment of lifesaving vehicle safety technologies. The issuance of standards, as mandated by Congress in the IIJA, for proven vehicle safety technology including advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS) like automatic emergency braking and advanced impaired driving prevention technology, will be game-

changing.^{xv} History has proven this approach to be valuable. It is estimated that Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards administered by NHTSA are responsible for saving at least 600,000 lives between 1960 and 2012.^{xvi} It is also incumbent upon NHTSA to exert leadership and strong oversight as vehicles are equipped with automated driving features, including the issuance of safety standards for the technologies and systems that are responsible for the driving task as well as cybersecurity, and to ensure data transparency. The Agency's ability to effectively protect the public and minimize potential safety risks necessitates additional funding and resources, including for hiring staff with essential skills and expertise.

This Committee plays a critical role in our efforts to curb highways deaths and injuries, and their enduringly high numbers demand decisive action. Providing adequate funding and staff resources to the U.S. DOT and its safety agencies will ensure timely implementation of the safety requirements of the IJA and address the urgent need to advance additional proven and cost-effective solutions to prevent crashes and save lives.

Sincerely,

Catherine Chase, President
Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety

Jill Ingrassia, Executive Director
AAA Advocacy & Communications

Georges C. Benjamin, MD, Executive Director
American Public Health Association

Michael Brooks, Executive Director
Center for Auto Safety

Joan Claybrook
Former Administrator, NHTSA

Jack Gillis
Consumer Federation of America

Rosemary Shahan, President
Consumers for Auto Reliability and Safety

Amy Cohen, Co-Founder
Families for Safe Streets

Jonathan Adkins, CEO
Governors Highway Safety Association

Janette Fennell, Founder and President
Kids and Car Safety

Stephanie Manning, Chief Government Affairs
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Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)

Lorraine Martin, President & CEO
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Parents Against Tired Truckers (P.A.T.T.)

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Parents Against Tired Truckers (P.A.T.T.) and
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Andrew McGuire, Executive Director
Trauma Foundation

Tami Friedrich, President
Truck Safety Coalition and
Board Member, Citizens for Reliable and Safe
Highways

cc: Members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

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- ⁱ National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2024, April). *Overview of motor vehicle traffic crashes in 2022* (Traffic Safety Facts Research Note. Report No. DOT HS 813 560). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.
- ⁱⁱ National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2024, April). *Overview of motor vehicle traffic crashes in 2022* (Traffic Safety Facts Research Note. Report No. DOT HS 813 560). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.
- ⁱⁱⁱ National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2024, April). *Early estimate of motor vehicle traffic fatalities in 2023* (Crash•Stats Brief Statistical Summary. Report No. DOT HS 813 561). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.
- ^{iv} National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2024, April). *Early estimate of motor vehicle traffic fatalities in 2023* (Crash•Stats Brief Statistical Summary. Report No. DOT HS 813 561). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.
- ^v Traffic Safety Facts: Research Note Overview of Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes in 2022, NHTSA, April 2024, DOT HS 813 560.
- ^{vi} *Id.* and Traffic Safety Facts 2021: A Compilations of Motor Vehicle Crash Data, NHTSA, Dec. 2023, DOT HS 813 527. Note, the 76 percent figure represents the overall change in the number of fatalities in large truck involved crashes from 2009 to 2022. However, between 2015 and 2016 there was a change in data collection at U.S. DOT that could affect this calculation. From 2009 to 2015 the number of fatalities in truck involved crashes increased by 21 percent and between 2016 to 2022, it increased by 27 percent.
- ^{vii} Traffic Safety Facts: Research Note Overview of Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes in 2022, NHTSA, April 2024, DOT HS 813 560.
- ^{viii} National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2024, April). *Early estimate of motor vehicle traffic fatalities in 2023* (Crash•Stats Brief Statistical Summary. Report No. DOT HS 813 561). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.
- ^{ix} The Economic and Societal Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes, 2019, NHTSA, Dec. 2022, DOT HS 813 403.
- ^x Cost of Motor Vehicle Crashes to Employers 2019, Network of Employers for Traffic Safety, March 2021.
- ^{xi} U.S. Department of Transportation, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Transportation Statistics Annual Report 2023 (Washington, DC: 2023). <https://doi.org/10.21949/1529944>
- ^{xii} FY2025 Budget Highlights, Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg, U.S. Department of Transportation. Available here: https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2024-03/DOT_Budget_Highlights_FY_2025_508.pdf; and Public Law 94-387, August 14, 1976, Available here: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-90/pdf/STATUTE-90-Pg1171.pdf#page=8>
- ^{xiii} National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2023, December). Traffic safety facts 2021: A compilation of motor vehicle traffic crash data (Report No. DOT HS 813 527). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.
- ^{xiv} FY2025 Budget Highlights, Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg, U.S. Department of Transportation. Available here: https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2024-03/DOT_Budget_Highlights_FY_2025_508.pdf
- ^{xv} On April 29, 2024, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) issued a Final Rule to require automatic emergency braking (AEB) with pedestrian detection on all new passenger vehicles and light trucks by September 1, 2029. Available [here](#).
- ^{xvi} Lives Saved by Vehicle Safety Technologies and Associated Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards, 1960 to2012, DOT HS 812 069 (NHTSA, 2015); See also, NHTSA AV Policy, Executive Summary, p. 5 endnote 1.