

June 26, 2024

The Honorable Sam Graves, Chair
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rick Larsen, Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Graves and Ranking Member Larsen:

We respectfully request that this letter be considered during tomorrow's Committee hearing, *Oversight of the Department of Transportation's Policies and Programs and Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Request*. 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 for the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) and its agencies, including funds and staff for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA, "Agency"), are vital.

According to NHTSA, traffic fatalities and injuries remain at historically high levels. In 2022, an average of 116 people were killed every day on roads in the U.S., totaling just over 42,500 fatalities.ⁱ An additional 2.38 million people were injured.ⁱⁱ This is a 29 percent increase in deaths in just a decade.ⁱⁱⁱ Early projections for 2023 traffic fatalities remain at a similar level; nearly 41,000 people are estimated to have died that year.^{iv} Approximately 7,522 pedestrians and 1,105 bicyclists were killed in 2022, representing a one percent and 13 percent increase respectively, from 2021.^v In 2022, 6,218 motorcyclists were killed, accounting for 15 percent of all traffic fatalities.^{vi} This is the highest number of motorcyclists killed since at least 1975.^{vii} Additionally, in 2022, nearly 6,000 people were killed in crashes involving a large truck.^{viii} Since 2009, the number of fatalities in large truck involved crashes has increased by 76 percent.^{ix} More than 160,600 people were injured in crashes involving a large truck in 2022, a nearly four percent increase over 2021.^x

Several leading behavioral issues continue to be leading factors in traffic fatalities including alcohol-impairment, speeding and lack of restraint use.^{xi} Driver distraction is also known to be a principal cause of motor vehicle crashes.^{xii} In 2022, alcohol-involved crashes claimed the lives of 13,524 people, speeding-related traffic crashes killed 12,151 people, and 11,302 people killed in crashes did not buckle up, when restraint use was known.^{xiii} Additionally, in 2021, the most recent year for which data is available according to the Non-Traffic Surveillance (NTS) system, an estimated 3,990 people were killed in non-traffic motor vehicle crashes, an increase of 26 percent from 2020.^{xiv} And, since 1990, at least 1,086 children have died in hot cars.^{xv} This dangerous road epidemic is predicated on dangerous roadway design (*See 2024 Dangerous by Design [report](#)*). These issues are persistent, and the solutions are known and available, yet remain underused, underfunded or are not required as standard equipment in vehicles.

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.^{xvi} Distracted driving crashes accounted for \$98 billion of the economic costs.^{xvii} In 2018, crashes alone cost employers \$72.2 billion.^{xviii} When adjusted solely for inflation, the amount is nearly \$90 billion in 2024. 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.^{xix} 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^{xx, xxi}

| 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 bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA, Pub. L. 117-58) including for roadway infrastructure improvements consistent with the Safe System Approach (SSA) which are shown to prevent or mitigate crashes and interactions between road users. 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.^{xxii} 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 elapse 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 IIA, for proven vehicle safety technology, including advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS) and advanced impaired driving prevention technology, will be game-changing. 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.^{xxiii} 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 highway deaths and injuries, and their enduringly high numbers demand decisive action. Adequate funding and staff resources for the U.S. DOT and its safety agencies are necessary to ensure timely implementation of the safety requirements of the IIA 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

Jack Gillis
Consumer Federation of America

Rosemary Shahan, President
Consumers for Auto Reliability and Safety

Jonathan Adkins, CEO
Governors Highway Safety Association

Janette Fennell, Founder and President
Kids and Car Safety

Lorraine Martin, President & CEO
National Safety Council

Daphne and Steve Izer, Founders & Co-Chairs
Parents Against Tired Truckers (P.A.T.T.)

Russell Swift, Co-Chair
Parents Against Tired Truckers (P.A.T.T.) and
Board Member, Truck Safety Coalition

Torine Creppy, President
Safe Kids Worldwide

Stephen Hargarten, MD, MPH, Founding
President
Society for the Advancement of Violence and
Injury Research

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. House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

-
- ⁱ Overview of Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes in 2022, NHTSA, Apr. 2024, DOT HS 813 560. (Overview 2022).
- ⁱⁱ Overview 2022.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Traffic Safety Facts 2021: A Compilation of Motor Vehicle Crash Data, NHTSA, Dec. 2023, DOT HS 813 527, (Annual Report 2021); and Overview 2022; [comparing 2013 to 2022].
- ^{iv} Traffic Safety Facts: Crash Stats, Early Estimate of Motor Vehicle Traffic Fatalities in 2023, NHTSA, Apr. 2024, DOT HS 813 561.
- ^v Overview 2022.
- ^{vi} NHTSA, Motorcycle Safety, Overview, available at: <https://www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/motorcycles#:~:text=Overview,killed%20since%20at%20least%201975>.
- ^{vii} *Id.*
- ^{viii} Traffic Safety Facts: Research Note Overview of Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes in 2022, NHTSA, April 2024, DOT HS 813 560.
- ^{ix} *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.
- ^x Traffic Safety Facts: Research Note Overview of Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes in 2022, NHTSA, April 2024, DOT HS 813 560.
- ^{xi} 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.
- ^{xii} Blincoc, L., Miller, T., Wang, J.-S., Swedler, D., Coughlin, T., Lawrence, B., Guo, F., Klauer, S., & Dingus, T. (2023, February). The economic and societal impact of motor vehicle crashes, 2019 (Revised) (Report No. DOT HS 813 403).
- ^{xiii} 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.
- ^{xiv} National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2024, April). NonTraffic Surveillance: Fatality and injury statistics in non-traffic crashes in 2021 (Report No. DOT HS 813 539). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.
- ^{xv} Child Hot Car Dangers Fact Sheet, Kids and Car Safety, available here: https://www.kidsandcars.org/document_center/download/hot-cars/Heatstroke-fact-sheet.pdf
- ^{xvi} The Economic and Societal Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes, 2019, NHTSA, Dec. 2022, DOT HS 813 403.
- ^{xvii} Blincoc, L., Miller, T., Wang, J.-S., Swedler, D., Coughlin, T., Lawrence, B., Guo, F., Klauer, S., & Dingus, T. (2023, February). The economic and societal impact of motor vehicle crashes, 2019 (Revised) (Report No. DOT HS 813 403).
- ^{xviii} Cost of Motor Vehicle Crashes to Employers 2019, Network of Employers for Traffic Safety, March 2021.
- ^{xix} U.S. Department of Transportation, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Transportation Statistics Annual Report 2023 (Washington, DC: 2023). <https://doi.org/10.21949/1529944>
- ^{xx} 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>
- ^{xxi} 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.
- ^{xxii} 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
- ^{xxiii} Lives Saved by Vehicle Safety Technologies and Associated Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards, 1960 to 2012, DOT HS 812 069 (NHTSA, 2015); See also, NHTSA AV Policy, Executive Summary, p. 5 endnote 1.