

May 20, 2026

The Honorable Tom Cole, Chair  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Steve Womack, Chair  
Subcommittee on Transportation, and Housing and  
Urban Development, and Related Agencies  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jim Clyburn, Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Transportation, and Housing and  
Urban Development, and Related Agencies  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Cole, Ranking Member DeLauro, Chair Womack, and Ranking Member Clyburn:

Thank you for holding tomorrow's vital markup to consider the Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Budget for the U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT). Our organizations urge you to ensure adequate resources for the U.S. DOT and its agencies, including funds and staff for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA, "Agency"). We are committed to eliminating the preventable physical, emotional and economic toll of motor vehicle crashes, and robust funding is vital to accomplishing this safety priority.

### **Enduring and Expensive Dangers on our Nation's Roadways**

On average, nearly 108 people were killed every day on roads in the U.S., totaling 39,254 fatalities in 2024, the most recent final annual data from NHTSA.<sup>1</sup> This is a 20 percent increase in deaths in just a decade.<sup>2</sup> An additional 2.42 million people were injured.<sup>3</sup> This enduring and deadly road epidemic is predicated on dangerous roadway design.<sup>4</sup> Early estimates for 2025 find a welcome reduction in traffic fatalities to 36,640.<sup>5</sup> Yet, nearly 37,000 people killed on our roads is still reason for significant investments in solutions and the U.S. DOT and its safety agencies.

In 2024, 7,080 pedestrians and 1,103 pedalcyclists were killed in traffic crashes.<sup>6</sup> Motorcycles continue to be the most hazardous form of motor vehicle transportation;<sup>7</sup> 6,228 riders were killed in 2024.<sup>8</sup> That year, 5,340 people were killed and 161,201 were injured in large truck crashes.<sup>9</sup> Since 2009, the number of fatalities in large truck crashes has increased by 58 percent.<sup>10</sup> In that same timespan, the number of people injured in crashes involving large trucks rose by 118 percent.<sup>11</sup>

With regard to the leading contributing factors to motor vehicle crashes in 2024: alcohol impaired driving resulted in 11,904 people killed; speeding resulted in 11,288 people killed; 9,758 passenger vehicle occupants killed in crashes were unrestrained; and, crashes in which at least one driver was distracted resulted in at least 3,208 fatalities.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> And, since 1990, at least 1,170 children have died in hot cars.<sup>14</sup> These issues are persistent, and the solutions are known and available, yet remain underused, underfunded or are not required as standard equipment in vehicles.

In addition to the physical and emotional repercussions of motor vehicle crashes, the annual economic cost is approximately \$340 billion (2019 dollars).<sup>15</sup> This figure equates to every person living in the U.S. essentially paying an annual "crash tax" of over \$1,000. Moreover, the total value of societal harm from motor vehicle crashes in 2019, which includes loss of life, pain and decreased quality of life, was nearly \$1.4 trillion.<sup>16</sup> When adjusted solely for inflation, this figure amounts to over \$1.81 trillion.<sup>17</sup> Research from

the Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS) finds motor vehicle crashes cost employers \$72.2 billion in direct crash-related expenses in 2019.<sup>18</sup>

### The Need for Proven Solutions

The rapid development and deployment of lifesaving vehicle safety technologies have the potential to transform safety outcomes on our Nation’s roadways. The issuance of standards, as mandated by Congress in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), for proven vehicle safety technologies including automatic emergency braking (AEB), other advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS) and advanced impaired driving prevention technology, will be game-changing. History has proven this approach to be valuable. Research from NHTSA has estimated that, “From 1968 through 2019, NHTSA’s safety standards prevented more than 860,000 deaths on the nation’s roads, 49 million nonfatal injuries, and damage to 65 million vehicles. In 2019 alone, these standards prevented about 40,000 deaths, 1.9 million nonfatal injuries, and damage to 3.8 million vehicles,” and “[F]rom 1968 to 2019, the comprehensive societal benefits amounted to \$17.3 trillion, using 2019 dollars. In contrast, the total costs for the 52 years combined are roughly \$1 trillion.”<sup>19</sup> 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 adequate funding and resources, including hiring staff with essential skills and expertise.

Additionally, initiatives aimed at successfully 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 are essential. The Section 402 Highway Safety Program, Section 405 National Priority Safety Program and the Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) program, in combination with state adoption of essential traffic safety laws, can assist these ongoing efforts. Moreover, 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. 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.

### The Need for Adequate Funding

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.<sup>20</sup> 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, 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. 2026<sup>21, 22</sup>

Account	Appropriations (millions)			Change in Spending Power	Percent Change
	1977	1977 (\$2026)	2026		
Vehicle Safety	\$72	\$400.30	\$200	-\$200.30	-50.0%
State & Community Grants	\$89	\$494.80	\$1,000	\$505.20	102.1%

**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.**

<b>Count (millions)</b>	<b>1977</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>Change in Count</b>	<b>Percent Change</b>
<b>Licensed Drivers</b>	138	238	+100	72%
<b>Vehicle Registrations</b>	135	306	+171	126%

The decrease in traffic fatalities in 2024 and projected improvements in 2025 are needed steps in the right direction. However, our focus must remain steadfast to ensure continued safety progress. The enduringly high numbers of traffic fatalities and injuries demand decisive action, and this Committee plays a critical role in our efforts to do so. Providing adequate funding and staff resources to the U.S. DOT and its safety agencies can ensure timely implementation of the safety requirements 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, Vice President  
AAA Public Affairs

Michael Brooks, Executive Director  
Center for Auto Safety

Jennifer Tierney, Chair  
Citizens for Reliable and Safe Highways (CRASH)

Jack Gillis  
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Rosemary Shahan, President  
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Bill Nesper, Executive Director  
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Melissa Wandall, President  
National Coalition for Safer Roads

Lorraine Martin, President and CEO  
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Jennifer Smith, CEO  
Stopdistractions.org

Andrew McGuire, Executive Director  
Trauma Foundation

Tami Friedrich, President  
Truck Safety Coalition

cc: Members of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations

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- <sup>1</sup> Traffic Safety Facts: Research Note: Overview of Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes In 2024, NHTSA, DOT HS 813 791, Apr. 2026.
  - <sup>2</sup> Traffic Safety Facts 2023: A Compilation of Motor Vehicle Traffic Crash Data, NHTSA, DOT HS 813 738, Aug. 2025; and Traffic Safety Facts: Research Note: Overview of Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes In 2024, NHTSA, DOT HS 813 791, Apr. 2026. [Comparing 2014 to 2024]
  - <sup>3</sup> Traffic Safety Facts: Research Note: Overview of Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes In 2024, NHTSA, DOT HS 813 791, Apr. 2026.
  - <sup>4</sup> 2024 Dangerous by Design report. Available here: <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/dangerous-by-design/>
  - <sup>5</sup> Traffic Safety Facts: Crash Stats: Early Estimate of Motor Vehicle Traffic Fatalities and Fatality Rate in 2025, NHTSA, DOT HS 813 800, Apr. 2026.
  - <sup>6</sup> Traffic Safety Facts: Research Note: Overview of Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes In 2024, NHTSA, DOT HS 813 791, Apr. 2026.
  - <sup>7</sup> The Economic and Societal Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes, 2019 (Revised), NHTSA, DOT HS 813 403, Feb. 2023.
  - <sup>8</sup> Traffic Safety Facts: Research Note: Overview of Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes In 2024, NHTSA, DOT HS 813 791, Apr. 2026.
  - <sup>9</sup> Traffic Safety Facts: Research Note: Overview of Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes In 2024, NHTSA, DOT HS 813 791, Apr. 2026.
  - <sup>10</sup> Traffic Safety Facts 2023: A Compilation of Motor Vehicle Traffic Crash Data, NHTSA, DOT HS 813 738, Aug. 2025; and Traffic Safety Facts: Research Note: Overview of Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes In 2024, NHTSA, DOT HS 813 791, Apr. 2026. Note, the 58 percent figure represents the overall change in the number of fatalities in large truck involved crashes from 2009 to 2024. However, between 2015 and 2016 and between 2019 and 2020 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, between 2015 and 2016 it increased by 14%, between 2016 and 2019 it increased by 7.6%, between 2019 and 2020 it decreased by 1.7%, and between 2020 and 2024 it increased by 8.0%.
  - <sup>11</sup> Traffic Safety Facts 2023: A Compilation of Motor Vehicle Traffic Crash Data, NHTSA, DOT HS 813 738, Aug. 2025; and Traffic Safety Facts: Research Note: Overview of Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes In 2024, NHTSA, DOT HS 813 791, Apr. 2026. Note, the 118 percent figure represents the overall change in the number of people injured in large truck involved crashes from 2009 to 2024. However, between 2015 and 2016 and between 2019 and 2020 there was a change in data collection at U.S. DOT that could affect this calculation. From 2009 to 2015 the number of people injured in truck involved crashes increased by 59 percent, between 2015 and 2016 it increased by 14%, between 2016 and 2019 it increased by 18%, between 2019 and 2020 it decreased by 11, and between 2020 and 2024 it increased by 14%.
  - <sup>12</sup> Traffic Safety Facts: Research Note: Overview of Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes In 2024, NHTSA, DOT HS 813 791, Apr. 2026.
  - <sup>13</sup> Traffic Safety Facts: Crash Stats: Non-Traffic Surveillance: Fatality and Injury Statistics in Non-Traffic Crashes in 2021, NHTSA, DOT HS 813 539, Apr. 2024.
  - <sup>14</sup> 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](https://www.kidsandcars.org/document_center/download/hot-cars/Heatstroke-fact-sheet.pdf)
  - <sup>15</sup> The Economic and Societal Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes, 2019, NHTSA, DOT HS 813 403, Dec. 2022.
  - <sup>16</sup> The Economic and Societal Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes, 2019, NHTSA, DOT HS 813 403, Dec. 2022.
  - <sup>17</sup> CPI Inflation Calculator, BLS, available at [https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm), calculation Jan. 2019 – Jan. 2026.
  - <sup>18</sup> Cost of Motor Vehicle Crashes to Employers – 2019, Network of Employers for Traffic Safety, March 2021.
  - <sup>19</sup> Fatalities, Injuries, and Crashes Prevented by Vehicle Safety Technologies and Associated FMVSS, 1968 to 2019 – Passenger Cars and LTVs, DOT HS 813 611, Dec. 2024, and Historical Analysis of Costs and Benefits of FMVSS for Passenger Cars and LTVs on a Calendar-Year Basis, DOT HS 813 647, Dec. 2024.
  - <sup>20</sup> Transportation Fatalities By Mode, National Transportation Statistics
  - <sup>21</sup> 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](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>
  - <sup>22</sup> 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.