

**PRESIDENT DWIGHT D EISENHOWER  
AND THE  
FEDERAL ROLE IN HIGHWAY SAFETY**

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## **APPENDIX**

## PREFACE

This monograph began as a sidebar to my two-part article, “The Man Who Changed America,” in *Public Roads* magazine (March/April 2003 and May/June 2003). In “President Eisenhower on Highway Safety,” I intended to quote from several of the President’s speeches on the subject to supplement the other online sidebars I had written to elaborate on the President’s interest in highways.

The speeches, however, needed context, and as I provided it, I began thinking about one of President Harry S. Truman’s comments during his speech to the May 1946 Highway Safety Conference. The focus of his speech and the conference was on rallying public support and improving State motor vehicle laws and driver licensing and education. After summarizing his unsuccessful efforts as a United States Senator to enact Federal legislation on motor vehicle registration and driver licensing, the President said the Congress was not ready at the time to interfere with what were seen as State prerogatives. He added:

At the same time, we cannot expect the Congress and the Federal Government to stand idly by if the toll of disaster continues to go unchecked.

Just a few months longer than 20 years later, standing idly by ended. On September 9, 1966, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966 and the Highway Safety Act of 1966. The signing ceremony in the Rose Garden of the White House marked a transformation in the Federal role in highway safety that had been slowly growing during the Eisenhower Administration, but had finally taken hold as fatalities on the Nation’s highways climbed toward 50,000. The steps taken during the previous 2 decades to reverse the trend had failed and the old “truths”—that highway safety was a State responsibility, that drivers could be convinced or taught to drive safely, and that the automobile industry should set its own rules—were revealed as insufficient in the wake of ever increasing fatalities and injuries.

The sidebar grew into “President Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Federal Role in Highway Safety,” the story of how this transformation took place.

In writing this monograph, I took advantage of the chronological history of the war on traffic deaths and injuries contained in the pages of the National Safety Council’s magazine *Public Safety* (*Traffic Safety* beginning in July 1957). Because each issue reflected contemporary thinking as it evolved, the magazine helped tell the story of the transformation nationally as the Federal Government moved gradually, even reluctantly, from rallying public support to legislating changes.

Throughout the monograph, I relied on fatality, injury, and other statistics reported in the magazine. Aside from the consistency this approach provided, I adopted it because these statistics were used by all sources in speeches and articles at the time of the events

described. Final statistics accepted by the U.S. Department of Transportation vary, often significantly. See Appendix 1 for fatalities, VMT, and fatality rates, 1950-2002.

I want to thank the U.S. Department of Transportation Library for the resources it made available for this monograph. As always, its staff was consistently helpful and productive—as well as patient when I held magazines and publications beyond the due dates. Loretta A. Hoffman, Manager of the Circulation and Interlibrary Loan Services, was especially helpful (and patient). Sherie A. Abassi and Barbara D. Day in the FHWA's Office of Chief Counsel were also helpful in tracking down obscure information about laws and resolutions passed many years ago.

I also want to thank Sonquela “Sonnie” Seabron for her invaluable research assistance at key points. On several occasions, she went to the Library of Congress with only a barebones description of what I was looking for and found exactly what I had in mind. She also used her research skills in the U.S. Department of Transportation Library and the Martin Luther King Jr. Public Library with equally useful results. In addition, Sonnie used her computer skills to provide the illustrations that accompany this monograph.

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## INTRODUCTION

In explaining his support for highway improvements, President Dwight D. Eisenhower cited several factors, including the growing number of fatal accidents on the Nation's roads. For his Grand Plan speech on July 12, 1954 (delivered to the Nation's Governors by Vice President Richard M. Nixon), Eisenhower's notes included safety among several penalties resulting from "this obsolete net which we have today." He said:

Our first most apparent [penalty is] an annual death toll comparable to the casualties of a bloody war, beyond calculation in dollar terms. It approaches 40 thousand killed and exceeds one and three-tenths million injured annually.

He also referred to "all the civil suits that clog up our courts." Half the suits, he estimated, "have their origins on highways, roads and streets."

Although the Grand Plan launched the fight for the Interstate System, President Eisenhower's campaign for highway safety began even before he took office. In a late 1952 statement to the Hearst Newspaper chain, which was then involved in a massive campaign in support of better highways, President-elect Eisenhower emphasized the need for good roads in view of the "appalling problem of waste, death and danger." He added:

There were 37,500 men, woman and children killed in traffic accidents last year, and those injured totaled another 1,300,000. This awful total presents a real crisis to America. As a humane nation, we must end this unnecessary toll. Property losses have reached a staggering total, and insurance costs have become a real burden.

During his 8 years as President, Eisenhower would return to these images periodically—and attempt to do something about them.

## CHAPTER 1

### PRESIDENT HARRY S. TRUMAN'S HIGHWAY SAFETY CONFERENCES

#### **President Truman and the Action Program**

President Harry S. Truman, who had been a road builder as a young man and an avid motorist his whole life, had also been concerned about the growing traffic safety problem—and with good reason.

Fatalities had reached 39,969 in 1941 before restrictions on driving during World War II (such as rationing of gasoline and tires and reduced speed limits) and the departure of many motorists for military service resulted in reduced highway deaths of 23,823 in 1943 and 24,300 in 1944. After the restrictions were lifted after the war ended in mid-1945, highway deaths increased to 33,500 in 1946.

On December 18, 1945, President Truman wrote to Major General Philip B. Fleming, Administrator of the Federal Works Agency (which included the Public Roads Administration (PRA)), to express concern about “the extent of traffic accidents on the Nation’s streets and highways which have increased alarmingly since the end of gasoline rationing.” The loss of lives, bodily injuries, and property destruction were “a drain upon the nation’s resources which we cannot possibly allow to continue.” The President said:

It is my intention to call into conference at the White House next spring representatives of the States and municipalities who have legal responsibility in matters of highway traffic, together with representatives of the several national organizations which have a primary interest in traffic safety. I hope that additional means may be devised by such a conference to make our streets and highways safer for motorists and for the public before the beginning of the automobile touring season of 1946.

He asked General Fleming to serve as general chairman of the President’s Highway Safety Conference, which would be held on May 8 to 10, 1946, in the Departmental Auditorium on Constitution Avenue in Washington. The PRA provided most of the conference staff and aided in preparing and assembling reports to the conference.

The 2,000 participants included Federal, State, and local officials, civic leaders, highway transportation and traffic technicians, and leaders of national organizations. *Public Safety* magazine, published by the National Safety Council, described the opening:

From the very start the conference was impressive. The invocation at the opening session marked a note of solemnity. Then came the dramatic highlight of the day, when the scarlet-jacketed Marine Band struck up the traditional greeting to the Chief Executive of the United States of America—“Hail to the Chief”—and

General Chairman Maj. Gen. Philip B. Fleming introduced the speaker with the words, “Ladies and gentleman—the President of the United States.”

As the President stood at the speaker’s platform and the audience rose to honor him, it marked the first time in the history of the United States that a President had addressed such a gathering.

The President told the participants, “The problem before you is urgent.” He referred to the increased number of fatalities since travel restrictions had been lifted after World War II. “During the three days of the Conference, more than one hundred will be killed, and thousands injured,” he said.

He told the participants that he had studied the problem when he was in the Senate. “I found at that time that more people had been killed in automobile accidents than had been killed in all the wars we had ever fought, beginning with the French and Indian wars.” This was a “startling statement,” but he added that, “More people have been injured, permanently, than were injured in both the World Wars—from the United States.”

*Public Safety*’s account of the conference referred to the “hush of expectancy” as the President had begun to speak:

Delegates were stirred by the intense and personal interest Mr. Truman injected into his remarks. And, when the vigor of his interest forced him to lay aside his carefully prepared address and launch into one of the most vehement and vitriolic attacks on reckless driving ever delivered by a high government official, even the trim MP’s stationed at each side of the speaker’s platform were startled out of their impassive rigidity.

Speech put aside, Truman criticized State driver licensing requirements, including those in his home State of Missouri:

You know, in some States—my own in particular—you can buy a license to drive a car for twenty-five cents at the corner drug store. It’s a revenue-raising measure. It isn’t used for safety at all.

He added:

It is perfectly absurd that a man or a woman or a child, can go to a place and buy an automobile and get behind the wheel—whether he has ever been there before makes no difference, or if he is insane, or he is a “nut,” or a moron doesn’t make a particle of difference—all he has to do is just pay the price and get behind the wheel and go out on the street and kill somebody.

And that is actually what happens.



As a United States Senator, he had studied the problem of driver licensing:

Some States, at the time I made this investigation—I think there were seven or eight, including the District of Columbia—had license requirements which required drivers to know something about running a car—certain safety signals, to know a green light from a red one, to know which hand to put out when he was going to turn right or left.

He had tried to pass legislation to impose certain requirements on drivers, but the bill had failed in the House of Representatives because of a concern about the States' right to control operation of their highways. He agreed that the State and local governments were responsible for highway construction, licensing of drivers and vehicles, regulating traffic flow, and deciding on driver instruction in the schools:

Now that is the responsibility of State Governments . . . . It is not intended that the Federal Government shall encroach upon the rights and responsibilities of the States. At the same time, we cannot expect the Congress and the Federal Government to stand idly by if the toll of disaster continues to go unchecked.

Given the difficulty of securing Federal action, the President challenged the participants:

But they have been standing idly by for the last 25 years, and I think they will continue to stand idly by, unless you do something to force the control of this terrible weapon which goes up and down our roads and streets all this time. The challenge must and will be met. I firmly hope and believe that every agency of government, backed by the aroused support of its citizens, will meet its responsibilities fully in this field.

The President was certain the public would respond wholeheartedly to appeals for safe and sensible conduct. Beyond that, “modern techniques of enforcement, engineering, and education” could help make communities safe. The techniques, he said, would be discussed during the conference. He concluded:

Out of their studies and reports, you can formulate a uniform and balanced highway safety program. I urge you to take this program back home with you, and to take whatever steps are needed to see that it is adopted.

I also appeal to every driver and pedestrian for cooperation in making our streets and highways safer. Give this program your earnest and continuous support, individually and through organized effort. In that direction lies the promise of a safer and a happier United States of America.

According to *Public Safety's* account, “The thunderous roar of applause that greeted his remarks left no doubt that the gathering would produce a program to fulfill his hopes and expectations.”

One result of the conference was an Action Program to combat highway deaths and injuries. It addressed collection and analysis of accident records, adoption of a Uniform Vehicle Code and Model Traffic Ordinances to cut confusion over road rules, education in the schools, increased enforcement of traffic laws, improved highway design to eliminate hazards, adoption of sound driver and motor vehicle licensing requirements, and an aggressive public information campaign.

Another result was Executive Order 9775, which President Truman signed on September 3, 1946. The Executive Order established the Federal Committee on Highway Safety, as recommended by the President's Safety Conference. The Federal Committee included representatives of 13 Federal Agencies:

- Public Roads Administration
- National Bureau of Standards
- Bureau of the Census
- Federal Works Agency
- Office of Education
- Federal Bureau of Investigation
- Department of Agriculture
- Department of the Interior
- Department of War
- Department of the Navy
- Post Office Department
- Interstate Commerce Commission
- Federal Interdepartmental Safety Council

General Fleming was chairman, while Commissioner of Public Roads Thomas H. MacDonald served as chairman of the Executive Committee of the Federal Committee.

The purpose of the Federal Committee was:

The Committee shall promote highway safety and the reduction of highway traffic accidents and, to this end, shall encourage Federal agencies concerned with highway safety activities to cooperate with agencies of State and local governments similarly concerned, with nationwide highway safety organizations of State and local officials, and with national non-official highway safety organizations, as the Committee may determine. The Committee shall also, to the extent permitted by law, coordinate the highway safety activities of Federal agencies.

The Executive Order also asked the head of each of the Federal Agencies to take "such measures within his sphere of responsibility as will result in improved highway safety conditions; to cooperate with the Committee with a view toward attainment of improved highway safety conditions; and, consonant with law, to provide the Committee with necessary staff assistance."

## The President's Second Highway Safety Conference

The President sponsored a second Highway Safety Conference in Washington on June 18-20, 1947, to review progress in highway safety and develop additional ways of implementing the Action Program. The conference, again under the general chairmanship of General Fleming, had been requested by three national committees created after the original session:

- State and Local Officials' National Highway Safety Committee,
- National Committee for Traffic Safety, and
- Federal Committee on Highway Safety.

(The National Committee on Uniform Traffic Laws and Ordinances, which had been in operation for many years, joined the President's Highway Safety Conference as its fourth committee in Fiscal Year 1950.)

Once again, President Truman was the special guest on the first day of the event. *Public Safety* set the stage for his speech:

The words of the opening sessions threaded the serious import of the Conference with a note of marked solemnity. The dress uniforms of the Marine band formed a spot of color in the highlight of the meeting, when the strains of the nation's traditional greeting to the Chief Executive brought the audience to its feet to honor him, as Maj.-Gen. Philip B. Fleming, the general chairman, ushered him to the speaker's platform with the words of introduction: "Ladies and Gentlemen, the President of the United States."

Flanking the President on both sides and across the back of the stage, a guard of honor stood rigidly at attention. Comprising picked officers from state and city law enforcement agencies, and commanded by Col. C. W. Woodson, of the Virginia State police, they represented the enforcement effort of the whole nation. Their presence on the platform witnessed the President's high regard for the agencies they represented.

After greeting the delegates, the President summarized the "problem of prime importance to every resident of our Nation." He began by citing the Nation's increased traffic—nearly 350 billion vehicle miles in 1946, a 4-percent increase over volumes in 1941:

In a very real sense, the increase in post-war highway travel is a measure of our return to the happier peacetime pattern of life in America. There is one tragic aspect of that pattern, however, that no one wishes to see restored. I refer to the appalling destruction of life and property through highway accidents.

After noting that 40,000 lives were lost on the Nation's highways in 1940, he said that in 1946, "with travel 4 percent higher, an even greater loss would have been sustained if the prewar death rate had continued." He was referring to a comparison of the fatality rate

(deaths per 100 million vehicle miles, a way of comparing fatalities over time as traffic volumes change):

Fortunately, that did not happen. Beginning in May 1946, the highway fatality rate showed a sharp and gratifying decline. Last year, the rate was 9.8 deaths per 100 million vehicle-miles, compared with 12 in 1941.

The result was that at least 6,500 lives had been saved, “a major victory in the campaign against carelessness.” The major share of credit “must go to the efficient and devoted efforts which were set in motion at the first Highway Safety Conference here in Washington in May 1946.” The results demonstrated what could be achieved “through the concerted effort of motorists and pedestrians, under the leadership of governmental agencies and with the support of organized groups of public-spirited citizens.”

In 1946, 33,500 men, women, and children had been killed in highway accidents:

If those deaths had occurred at the same time in a single community, the whole world would have been profoundly shocked. Every resource of the United States would have been mobilized immediately to prevent the recurrence of such an awful tragedy.

The challenge is no less urgent because it is less spectacular.

Given the initial success, the next goal must be to increase compliance with the Action Program throughout the country. Encouraging progress had been made in safety education, especially driver education in high schools. He was discouraged by the limited progress on driver licensing. Two additional States had enacted driver license laws, leaving only one State without such a law:

But uniformity is still lacking among the States. And in too many jurisdictions, as I have pointed out before, the licensing laws are nothing more than revenues measures and their administration a travesty on public safety.

He added that the States had made little progress in raising the standards of motor vehicle administration.

Considering that licensing and standards were basic weapons in “the war on accidents,” the present situation “cannot be permitted to continue indefinitely.” As he had said in 1946, he did not want the Federal Government to encroach on State jurisdiction, but he did not believe the Congress would “stand idly by in the face of a grievous national accident toll.” Highway safety was a “direct concern” of the Federal Government, which could do much, short of encroaching on State jurisdiction, to reduce the tragic toll:

The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1944, for example, provides for the development jointly with the States of modern traffic arteries, both rural and

urban, which will incorporate maximum safety into their design and construction. Improvements of this kind in the highway plant will make a permanent and substantial contribution to accident prevention.

He was referring to the provision of the 1944 Act that authorized the Federal Works Agency to designate a 40,000-mile National System of Interstate Highways as the backbone of the Nation's highway network. Because the designation process was not accompanied by special funding or a Federal commitment to build the network, little progress would be made until the mid-1950s.

Although "vigorous progress" had been made under the Action Program, many shortcomings remained:

The purpose of the meeting is to weigh the strength and the weakness of the current program, and to outline further steps which can be taken to speed the adoption of the "Action Program" by all jurisdictions.

*Public Safety* reported:

The thundering ovation rendered the President at the close of his address left no doubt but that the gathering would find ways and means of strengthening the program by coordinated effort to meet specifications demanded by increased travel and more cars in time to fulfill his hopes and expectations.

An editorial in the weekly newspaper of motor freight carriers, *Transport Topics*, agreed that progress in the past year had been "gratifying." The reduction in the fatality rate was one-third of the way to the goal of 6 per 100 million vehicle miles by 1949.

In other words, one-third of a three-year job was done in the first year indicating that safety progress was on schedule.

Furthermore, experienced safety men say that the accident reduction progress made in the single year probably was as great as normally would have occurred in four or five years—a tribute to the President for taking a personal hand in the safety movement and to those who have sparked the Conferences.

For all the progress, the editorial acknowledged the remaining challenge:

The one-third cut in the accident rate thus far accomplished is the "easy" third. Now that the cream has been skimmed from the accident-reduction bottle, concrete plans must be put into effect to produce the other two-thirds in the way of accomplishments.

Although President Truman did not convene a national conference in 1948, the Committee on Conference Reports met in the summer to study reports submitted by eight technical committees. The Governors of 44 States assigned official delegates. One of the

major results of the meeting was an inventory of traffic safety activities to serve as an annual score card the States and cities could use to measure the effectiveness of their safety programs.

The PRA's annual report for 1948 summarized the progress since the first conference:

This annual inventory of the advances in highway safety under the action program of the President's Conference revealed that the fatality rate declined from an average of 12 deaths per hundred-million vehicle-miles of travel in the decade 1936-45, to 9.9 in 1946, 8.6 in 1947, and 7.5 during the first four months of 1948.

The committee voted to hold a third nationwide meeting in Washington. President Truman agreed to do so, noting that progress since 1946 had been "steady and gratifying."

### **The President's 1949 Highway Safety Conference**

With General Fleming as General Chairman, the President's Highway Safety Conference took place on June 1 to 3, 1949, in Washington. About 2,500 delegates representing the 48 States, cities, counties and organizations concerned with highway safety attended the conference, along with more than 100 representatives of 32 foreign countries.

The general sessions on June 1 and 3 were held in the Departmental Auditorium on Constitution Avenue. On June 2, the delegates gathered in Constitution Hall. Once again, the Marine Band struck up "Hail to the Chief" and General Fleming introduced the President. *Public Safety* set the stage:

As the President stood at the speaker's platform and the audience rose to honor him, it marked the third time in the history of the United States that a President had addressed such a gathering. Significantly enough, it was President Truman who established each such high water mark in the history of traffic safety.

The President told them that results since the 1946 conference were encouraging, as "a substantial number of States and communities" had adopted the safety program. He estimated that as a result, 11,000 lives had been saved, and injuries to 400,000 people had been prevented. "Nevertheless," he said, "the frightful slaughter on our streets and highways continues." In 1948, the total of 32,000 people killed in highway accidents was more than twice as many as were killed "in all the American Forces during 6 weeks of the Normandy campaign in 1944," referring to the D-Day invasion of France on June 6, 1944, that marked the Allied initiative to end World War II.

He pointed out that 429 people lost their lives during the Decoration Day weekend (the original name, dating to 1868, of Memorial Day), half of them in traffic accidents:

Now, if a town had been wiped out by a tornado or a flood or a fire and killed 429 people, there would be a great hullabaloo about it. We would turn out the Red

Cross, and we would have the General declare an emergency, and I don't know what-all. Yet, when we kill them on the road, or unnecessarily drown them in accidents that shouldn't happen, we just take it for granted. We mustn't do that.

He was disappointed that some States had failed to establish driver licensing systems "worthy of the name." He said:

I am sorry to relate that my great State of Missouri is still in that column. Terrible! Why, a man can go down to a drugstore from an insane asylum and spend a quarter and get a license to drive on any road in that State, if he wants to.

Even States and cities with strict rules suffered from the lax controls in other States:

Here in the District, not long ago, whose driving laws are very strict, they found four men who couldn't see an inch in front of their noses, with driving licenses issued by one of these 25 States that don't take care of their populations.

He stressed the importance of driver education:

It takes years and years, you know, for a man to drive a steam engine down the tracks which it can't get off, yet we let anybody get a driving license for an automobile whether he knows front from back or right from left.

He told delegates, "State and local governments have a duty to deny the privilege of using public highways to the irresponsible, the unfit, and the chronic law violators." He did not repeat his threat of Federal intervention, but said the American people would support "sensible regulations, capably administered" to protect life and property.

He endorsed the annual inventory of traffic safety activities, developed in 1948, as "a useful yardstick and factual guide" that communities can use to measure their progress. He also was encouraged by increasing highway construction, which had gained momentum the last 18 months "after considerable delay due to shortages of materials and other factors":

The modern features which are being incorporated into new and reconstructed arteries of travel will go far toward eliminating head-on collisions and some of the other more severe types of accidents.

Progress was also being made in other areas, including improvement in the administration of traffic courts and enactment of uniform motor vehicle laws and ordinances. He summed up:

All in all, this conference can review a record of solid accomplishment. At the same time, you face clearly defined needs for more intensive work.

Given the progress to date in implementing the Action Program, the President was “confident that you will succeed” through teamwork:

This entire program has been developed and set in motion by voluntary teamwork. And the spirit which makes it possible is the spirit of a free people and the guarantee of our system of democracy.

According to *Public Safety*, “Delegates were obviously stirred by the vigor and the intense personal interest of the President’s remarks.”

An engineering progress report was released during the conference in support of the President’s comments about the safety benefits of increased highway construction. According to the report, most construction involved two-lane designs (94 percent of 18,195 miles), but the ratio of divided highways and undivided highways built was in excess of 5 to 1. Accident prone three-lane roads (a highly dangerous design that had once been popular because the center lane allowed for passing) were declining. The number of grade separations for highway intersections (119 locations) and rail-highway crossings (114) had increased in 1948 over the previous year. Also up were channelized intersections, lighting, sidewalks, marked crosswalks, centerline markings, no-passing zones, and highway signs and signals.

During the conference, participants agreed on a nationwide campaign to reduce the highway traffic death rate by 40 percent in the next 3 years. State, municipal, and safety organizations were urged to work toward a goal of reducing the national highway death rate to 5 persons per 100 million vehicle-miles traveled.

General Fleming told participants that he did not consider the goals “at all visionary.” The goals could be reached, he said, if all interests carried out a dynamic highway safety program. However, he summarized the frustrating reality of the highway safety situation:

Three years of activity since the initial President’s Highway Safety Conference has taught us several important lessons. We have found that the action program is sound, practicable, and comprehensive. Yet, the highway death toll continues to be a national disgrace. The fault lies, not in the action program itself, but in its uneven application.

Based on the technical committee reports during the conference, participants updated the Action Program. The revitalized Action Program involved seven main points, as summarized in a Department of Commerce press release dated May 12, 1952:

1. Adoption of the Uniform Vehicle Code and the Model Traffic Ordinance in the interest of uniformity in traffic laws and regulations.
2. More effective collection and analysis of traffic-accident reports and use of these reports in guiding highway-safety activities.
3. The continuance in all American schools of traffic-safety programs to give guidance in accident prevention.



4. The operation of continuing traffic-law-enforcement programs in cities and states that will stimulate maximum voluntary observance of regulations by creating adequate deterrence to violators.
5. Use of engineering principles and techniques to eliminate or reduce physical hazards and to promote the safe control of traffic movements.
6. Adoption by the States of sound policies and procedures in the field of motor-vehicle administration, with special attention to driver licensing and vehicle inspection.
7. Continuance by all public information media to spread the word about highway safety—and the lack of it—to the public.

### **Highway Safety for National Defense**

The Federal Works Agency was eliminated in a government reorganization in 1949, resulting in a shift of the PRA to the Department of Commerce and a change in the name of the PRA to its earlier name, the Bureau of Public Roads (BPR). President Truman appointed General Fleming to be Chairman of the Maritime Commission, but retained him as General Chairman of the President's Highway Safety Conference.

The Committee on Conference Reports met again in 1950, with special emphasis on rural roads. The BPR's 1950 annual report explained the reason:

Due to the tremendous increase in highway traffic, from less than 250 billion vehicles-miles in 1945 to more than 424 billion in 1949, the highway accident problem remained critical. The conference gave special consideration to the threat that for the first time in the 4-year history of the action program for traffic safety, the annual increase in traffic deaths outside of cities may more than offset the annual decline in urban centers.

The decline in the fatality rate encouraged backers of the Action Program, but the Committee on Conference Reports placed renewed emphasis on controlling traffic on rural roads.

President Truman wrote to General Fleming on August 30, 1950, to outline steps to be taken to increase highway safety. In the previous 2 months, North Korea had invaded South Korea, prompting the President to join with the United Nations Security Council in a war to repel the invasion. The President, therefore, began his letter to General Fleming by noting that, "Highway transportation is of the utmost importance to the national defense." It must be maintained "at the highest point of safety and efficiency." Immediate steps must be taken, he told General Fleming, to increase efficiency in the use of highway transportation facilities and coordinate action to ensure movement of defense commodities and military traffic.

Citing the declining fatality rate on the Nation's highways ("less than 7 during the first 6 months of 1950"), he wanted to build on the existing cooperation with State and local officials "to assist in the safe and efficient movement of increasing amounts of defense

materiel and military traffic.” He asked the General to evaluate how each State was applying the Action Program and determine how deficiencies could be reduced; use this analysis to ask States, communities, and private groups to increase their emphasis on highway safety “in the interest of conserving manpower, equipment, materials and highway facilities in the light of their increasingly critical importance”; cooperate with the Governors’ Conference to enhance highway transportation; and work with the Department of Defense “to expedite highway movements in the safest and most efficient manner in the event of an emergency.”

On February 22, 1951, President Truman announced he would convene the President’s Highway Safety Conference in Washington in June:

Preliminary figures for 1950 indicate that the number of deaths approached 35,000, personal injuries were suffered by 1,200,000 and the economic losses are estimated at \$2 ¼ billion. The figures for last year are the highest since 1941 – the all-time high year. This is the price the American public has paid for carelessness, ignorance, disregard of the law and inefficient driving.

The toll can be reduced. A practical program of action was developed at the first national conference, which I called in 1946, and it has demonstrated encouraging results. For the nation as a whole, the number of traffic deaths has been cut from 11.3 per 100 million vehicle miles of travel in 1945 to less than 7 in 1950. The program has reduced accidents wherever it has been applied.

However, it has not offset the huge increase in motor vehicle usage. Today 48 million automobiles, trucks and buses operate over our street and highway network, compared with a 1941 pre-war peak of 34.5 million. Safety activities must be enlarged and intensified to match this greatly increased exposure to accident.

In the months since the United States entered the Korean War in July 1950, the President had come to see the highway safety crusade as part of the defense effort. The need for a strong America, he said, made traffic safety “doubly urgent . . . . The defense effort depends upon the efficient movement of goods and people over public highways and roadways.”

General Fleming was to serve as general chairman of the 1951 conference, but he was confined by illness to Walter Reed Army Hospital. Secretary of Commerce Charles Sawyer, presiding over the conference in the General’s absence, introduced President Truman as the keynote speaker at the opening session on June 13 in Constitution Hall. The President told the delegates that in this time of war, the highway safety campaign was more important than ever:

This need for a strong America makes your work doubly urgent. Highway accidents strike directly at our national strength. A highway accident does just as

much damage to the defense effort, as a deliberate act of sabotage by a hostile agent.

The defense effort depended as much on efficient highway transportation as railway transportation. Traffic accidents “slow down production and weaken our whole economy” because of “carelessness and inefficiency.”

He reported on the progress under the Action Program since he had convened the first highway conference 5 years earlier. With the fatality rate declining, he said, “What we need to do now is to find a way to bring the accident rate in every State and city down to the level of the best record—and even lower.”

Lowering the fatality rate was a sign of progress, but “the sad fact is that, in spite of the progress we have made . . . the total number of accidents is going up.” He explained that as travel mileage “skyrocketed,” 35,000 people were killed and more than a million injured in traffic accidents. He said that in the last year, total casualties (killed, injured, captured) in Korea totaled less than 80,000, and that figure “is on the mind and tongue of every citizen.” He took the opportunity to take a poke at his critics:

But right here at home we kill and permanently injure a million and [kill] 35,000 people, and there is no outcry by the sabotage press, no misstatement by the columnists or the congressional demagogues.

If, he thought, “those fellows” wanted to pick on his Administration as it helped fight a war, here was an opportunity “and they ought to make use of it,” but they did not do so.

To avoid setting a record in the number of traffic deaths, the first step was to improve highways. Because of the Depression in the 1930’s and the disruption of World War II, highway progress had lagged for 20 years even as the number of vehicles had increased. “Much of our main road mileage is worn out and obsolete, and the replacement program has not kept pace with the increased use.” The highway program had expanded since the end of the war in 1945, but difficulties were again arising in diversion of construction materials for the war effort in Korea:

Some highway projects may have to be deferred. But good roads are essential, and we must not make the mistake of thinking that highways are expendable in an emergency period.

Safe roads were not enough, of course; “we must have safe drivers.” Driver education, particularly in high school, had been increasing, a fact that promises “a great deal for the future.”

The key to continuing progress, he felt, was “the continuous and intelligent support of the American people.” Each citizen had a personal responsibility to support highway safety:

This will take self-discipline, but it can be done. It’s a simple matter of good citizenship.

He then dramatized the issue by pointing out that at some point in 1951, “the number of traffic deaths since 1900 will pass the million mark”:

Nearly as many Americans have been killed in automobile accidents as have been killed in all the wars of our history, beginning 175 years ago with the War for Independence.

He pointed out that monuments had been erected to the men and women who gave their lives “for the purposes to which this Nation is dedicated.” They died in a noble cause, “But there is no noble purpose in death by traffic accidents.” He called on the delegates to “go home and get others to join you in vigorous support of the highway safety program.”

Having concluded the safety portion of his address, President Truman took a moment to address General Fleming’s wife, who was in attendance. The President explained that on May 7, 1946, he had given the Army Distinguished Service Medal to General Fleming for his direction of a construction program of Army and Navy buildings in the United States, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and Central America during the war. Since then, General Fleming “has rendered equally distinguished service in several posts, including his work as permanent general chairman of the President’s Highway Safety Conference.” Therefore, the President asked Mrs. Fleming to accept a gift from the Highway Safety Conference:

Let me read the inscription: “Philip Bracken Fleming. In appreciation of his immeasurable service, and unflinching guidance in the cause of highway safety”—the President’s Highway Safety Conference presents this. And I present it for the conference in the name of the President of the United States.

The BPR’s annual report for 1951 summarized the results of the conference:

The 1951 session emphasized the *how* of applying the action program for traffic safety, which was originally developed in 1946 and revised in 1949, and reviewed the annual conference inventory of advances and weaknesses in highway safety. The inventory indicated that the seriousness of the traffic safety problem has been increasing as unprecedented numbers of vehicles have been registered for use on the highways and as the volume of traffic has mounted since the close of World War II. The total of 35,000 people killed in traffic in 1950 has not been equaled since 1941. Yet, with preventive activity under the action program of the conference, the rate of fatalities has declined from an average of 12 deaths per 100 million vehicle-miles of travel in the decade 1936-45 to 7.5 in 1950.

## **The 1952 Highway Safety Conference**

President Truman decided not to run for reelection in 1952. During his last full year as President, he had many issues on his agenda, including the Korean War. But on April 11, he wrote to ask Secretary of Commerce Sawyer to spearhead a renewed highway safety program and serve as General Chairman of the President's Highway Safety Conference. General Fleming had served briefly as Undersecretary of Commerce for Transportation before President Truman appointed him Ambassador to Costa Rica in 1951, thus ending his service as General Chairman.

President Truman explained the frustrating reality:

In 1950 traffic fatalities reached 35,000. In 1951 this total increased to 37,500 and the National Safety Council estimates that a further increase to the alarming total of 40,000 will result from highway accidents during 1952. Coupled with the bodily injury to more than 1,000,000 persons and monetary losses approaching \$3,000,000,000, these staggering totals indicate the need for renewed and increased efforts.

After summarizing the history of conferences under his Administration, President Truman asked Secretary Sawyer to "enlist the active support of business and other civic groups as well as public officials."

On May 12, Secretary Sawyer announced he would establish an advisory committee of outstanding business and industrial executives to examine the highway safety problem. He invited them to the President's Highway Safety Conference on October 17-18 in Chicago's Hotel LaSalle. The goal of the conference was to review progress under the Action Program and devise means of gaining wider acceptance of its agenda.

The President did not participate in the Chicago conference. He was in New England on October 17 campaigning for the Democratic Party's nominee for President, Governor Adlai Stevenson of Illinois, and in New York City for the same reason on October 18.

The meeting of the President's Highway Safety Conference was a prelude to the annual meeting of the National Safety Congress in Chicago (October 20-24). According to *Public Safety* more than 12,000 delegates were in Chicago for the annual meeting, which was spread among five hotels (the Conrad Hilton, Congress, LaSalle, Morrison, and Sheraton).

Bertram D. Tallamy, New York's Superintendent of Public Works, addressed the President's Highway Safety Conference as Chairman, State and Local Officials, National Highway Safety Committee. He discussed the importance of highway transportation:

Almost everything that you use in your office or in your home, or the cup of coffee you had for breakfast, or the suit of clothes you are now wearing, was

dependent upon modern highway transportation at some time or other during its development and distribution.

The cost of transportation, therefore, was a tax “which affects everybody.” Part of that cost, Tallamy said, was the cost of traffic accidents, \$3.4 billion. He estimated that in New York, the cost of rebuilding the State’s highways over 20 years would be \$3.7 billion:

In other words, the traffic accident loss alone, last year, would take care of our 20-year program in New York. If you add this terrific traffic loss to the economic loss resulting from unnecessarily high transportation costs which always prevail when efficient trucks have to operate over inefficient highways, you can readily see we are paying for safe modern highways—yet we do not have them. It is ridiculous, but a fact.

He told the delegates he saw two principle avenues to follow. The first was to “expand reconstruction and to repair our existing highway systems just as rapidly as we possibly can do so.” This would “require a large amount of money,” as Tallamy knew from his service that year as President of the American Association of State Highway Officials (AASHO). He described a survey the State highway officials had conducted in 1949 on needs of the Federal-aid highway system:

It indicated that it would require \$29 billion to bring that system up to a reasonable degree of capacity and safety . . . . In other words, if one could have bought a magic wand, waved it across the country, and transformed worn-out roads to a modern highway system, the wand would have cost \$29 billion.

He added a frustrating note about the estimate:

Two years later we made another survey to see how we were getting along, because we had to spend over \$3 billion in that period. The results of the latest survey indicate that our deficit is now \$32 billion. In other words, even though we spent \$3 billion, we are \$3 billion worse off in a two-year period because of obsolescence and depreciation.

Considering that the estimate did not include State and local roads off the Federal-aid system, delegates could see, he said, “the problem ahead of us on that one main approach which must be followed if we are *ever* to get out of this highway dilemma.”

The second avenue was to use the existing highway network, during this period of reconstruction, “in the safest and most reasonable manner.” The Conference can be particularly effective in advancing this second avenue. The Conference “can, and must, in my opinion use its knowledge and appreciation of the overall highway problem to help make available the necessary funds to expedite reconstruction.”

He called for the many State and local agencies involved in highway safety to work together to “create a plan for an immediate attack on the problem of highway safety and the long-range goal of safe and efficient vehicle operation over modern highways.” With coordinated official and public support programs, the “inordinate tax which everyone is paying in cash and in sorrow and grief, can be minimized. It is a goal worth fighting for.”

Judge Alfred P. Murrah of Oklahoma, Chairman of the National Committee for Traffic Safety, was another featured speaker at the President’s Conference. A long-time crusader in the cause of highway safety, Judge Murrah told the delegates that the country was at a crossroads:

We are face to face with the question whether our scientific and technological ingenuity has outrun our moral capacity to assimilate. In short, are we capable of living with ourselves, or shall we commit suicide?

For an answer, he cited one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s acknowledged geniuses:

In 1946, Einstein spoke to Americans in a practical sort of way. He said that if mankind was to survive and move to higher levels, a new kind of thinking must pervade our lives; that we must remember that if the animal part of human nature is our foe, the thinking part is our friend; that we can and must use it now, or human society will disappear in a new and terrible dark age of mankind—perhaps forever.

Judge Murrah did not consider it an exaggeration to say that “the future well-being of mankind depends on how we do our job,” and particularly how well highway safety crusaders do in enlisting others in the effort. Better highways and streets were being built to accommodate more powerful vehicles, “but we must build more of them.” Laws were being enacted to regulate this power and speed, “but we must have more and better laws.” Those laws must be enforced in a way that generated respect rather than fear:

Obedience to law must come from the feeling of respect rather than fear of the screaming siren of the “copper.”

He said that just the day before, another member of the National Committee for Traffic Safety had asked him, “Now, Judge, when do we get out of the ‘resolving’ stage and into the business of saving lives?” Judge Murrah thought this question “pertinent, sincere, and deserves an answer.” For the answer, he likened the highway safety crusade to a football game played on home ground: “all over the field of play and in the grandstands is public support.” Public support, he said, “is the strategy and the code of the game.”

They must find a way to convert the rank and file to the cause. One way sometimes suggested involved the Christian tenet that “I am my brother’s keeper.” Applying this

tenet to highway safety would not be easy:

Someone has said that we never subscribe to the admonition that “I am my brother’s keeper” until we need to be kept; that we never appreciate danger until it strikes at our door.

Highway crusaders must, Judge Murrah said, become evangelists for their cause, speaking to civic clubs, cooperating with safety councils, encouraging ministers to speak on the topic from the pulpit. He concluded:

We come to the realization that it is not enough merely to appeal to the mind, we must appeal to the heart and to the soul of man. When we have done that, we will build an organization for safety rooted in the hearts and minds of the individual everywhere—that, my friends, is our goal and there can be no turning back.

Governor Dan Thornton of Colorado also addressed the President’s Highway Safety Conference. Without fear of contradiction, he said, reducing the number of traffic accidents was “one of the most positive challenges to public action in the United States.” And yet 1952 was headed for a “record of shame” in accident fatalities and injuries.

Since the early days of the Republic, the role of the States had been evolving. From the “early basic functions,” such as education and protection of life, the States had adapted to the “rapidly changing and increasingly complex society” of today:

The new age and its millions and millions of motor vehicles has contributed as much toward this change as any one other factor in history. Our adaptation to this development must be positive and constructive; it is a new responsibility of our states.

He warned that the motor age “cannot be dismissed as a temporary frill.” It must, he said, “be absorbed as a basic and fundamental function of state government.” Further, “we cannot hide our heads like an ostrich and escape a problem which is with us to stay—we are in a motor vehicle age—there is no alternative but to make that age safe for all generations.”

The implications of the motor vehicle age, and especially the safety problem, were “staggering.” The implications for government were especially important. Government is “a primary device for getting along together,” but when citizens ignore the “basic rules of human relationship,” government had to step in “to restrict individual freedom and movement in minimizing the continual threat to human life and liberty.”

He referred to a statement in the original Action Program: “The primary responsibility for traffic accident prevention lies with government.” In other emergencies and catastrophes, such as floods or disease, State government acted decisively. With executive, legislative, and judicial leadership, States enlisted the support of business and



industry to help in the crisis. A similar approach “could reduce the unnecessary loss of life due to traffic accidents.”

“Now,” he asked, “are the states carrying out these responsibilities?” He had to answer that they were not, and there would be two consequences of this failure:

One will be the continued loss of 40,000 lives per year. The other will be in terms of headlines such as these—appearing in our daily papers:

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO GIVE DRIVERS EXAM  
TRAFFIC VIOLATORS APPEAR IN FEDERAL COURTS  
CONGRESS PASSES 50 MPH SPEED LIMIT  
NATIONAL ACCIDENT RECORD OFFICES ESTABLISHED

Do these sound drastic? They are.

Are they alarming? They are.

Are they in 1952? They are not, but [they] are headlines of 1962 or 1972 if we do not progress together on a traffic safety program. We have already seen the federal government undertake many functions originally given to the states, because we refused or failed to undertake them and satisfy demands from our citizens. This can and will happen in this field of traffic safety, unless we can prove to our national leaders that we have the will and ability to curb a national disgrace.

These headlines are not of this year; but when they are written, you and I and every state and city official, will say to himself, “It didn’t have to happen this way—why didn’t we do something way back in 1952 to forestall it?”

After reviewing some of the State failures to address the Action Program, he concluded:

We are faced with the necessity of rededicating ourselves to the original Action Program of the President’s Highway Safety Conference . . . . The combination of a balanced official program combined with organized public support of that program will materially contribute to the reduction of the needless slaughter on our streets and highways.

Since President Truman had launched his highway safety initiative in 1946, the fatality rate had declined from 9.7 fatalities per 100 million miles of travel to 7.3 in 1952. However, the number of fatalities was growing. Post-war deaths declined to a low of 31,701 in 1949, before beginning to climb in 1950 (35,000 deaths), 1951 (37,300 deaths), and 1952 (38,000).

In January 1953, President Harry S. Truman returned to private life in Missouri. According to *Public Safety*, “The traffic death toll for January was 2,840—a 7 per cent

increase over the 2,650 deaths in January last year.” With a new President coming into office, the BPR’s annual report for 1952 stated that the committees of the President’s Highway Safety Conference were preparing for “a tremendous step-up in the entire safety program.”

Much work remained for the new President.

## CHAPTER 2

### A CRUSADE FOR SAFETY

#### **The Federal System**

When President Eisenhower took office on January 20, 1953, he had many issues to confront, particularly the Korean War, which ended in July 1953. But first, the Nation's Governors wanted to raise an issue that they thought the new President would be sympathetic to: the balance between State and Federal authority. This issue had been at the heart of the American political debate since before the drafting of the Constitution, but had taken on new life during the aggressive Presidencies of Franklin D. Roosevelt (1933-1945) and Harry S. Truman (1945-1953).

With the first Republican President in office since 1933, the Governors thought they finally had a chance to reverse the Washington power grab.

On January 21, 1953, the day after the President's inauguration, Governor Thornton and Governor Walter Kohler, Jr., of Wisconsin lunched with the President at the White House. In addition to their lunch of fried chicken, the Governors received a White House tour conducted by the President. They also discussed several topics with the President, including the conflicts between Federal and State taxes on the same products, such as gasoline, incomes, and automobiles. Governor Thornton suggested that the Federal Government get out of these fields of taxation, which he said traditionally belonged to the States.

That same day, the Governors' Conference Committee on Intergovernmental Relations and Tax and Fiscal Policy met at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington. In addition to Governors Kohler and Thornton, the committee included its chairman, Governor Alfred E. Driscoll of New Jersey; James F. Byrnes of South Carolina; John D. Lodge of Connecticut; G. Mennen Williams of Michigan; William S. Beardley of Iowa; and J. Bracken Lee of Utah.

The committee had been convened because the Governors' Conference had concluded that, "The tax policies of the federal government have made it virtually impossible for the state and local governments to obtain the revenues which they require." The Governors were particularly concerned about the "levying of taxes upon identical products by both state and federal governments" and wanted the committee to explore the proposition that:

. . . more efficient service to the citizens could be rendered at lower cost if certain of the taxes now levied by the federal government were abandoned to the states in lieu of federal grants-in-aid.

The committee decided that it would first review Federal grants for highways and the 2-cent Federal gas tax that was deposited in the treasury for general government purposes

(it had been raised a half-cent to help finance the Korean War). It directed the Council of State Governments to review the issue and provide a report for further consideration.

The Council's report, completed on February 20, 1953, covered the gas tax and Federal-aid highway program:

It is proposed that the Congress reduce federal expenditures by discontinuing the grant-in-aid program for highways, making special provision, however, for those states with large public lands and sparse populations. It is further proposed that at the same time legislation be enacted repealing the federal gasoline tax, thereby permitting the adoption of the two-cent tax in the several States.

Although this change, if enacted, would result in a short-term loss of Federal revenue, the loss would be made up by the efficiency of eliminating "the administrative duplication which now is part of the Federal Highway Act." Also counter-balancing the loss, in philosophy if not dollars, would be the reaffirmation of the States' responsibilities.

Every state now has a highway department with engineering and construction talent of a professional nature . . . . Competent professional people are . . . being attracted and are increasingly being paid salary schedules to insure their retention in the states. With these conditions, many Governors, expert consultants and state legislators are convinced that standards and specifications for road construction and maintenance will be kept at a high level.

That would be "the primary gain to the nation," according to the Council. Further, the Federal and State duplication of effort was "often a waste of engineering personnel." The report amplified this thought:

Countless hours of conference between state personnel and federal officials in approving highway construction and maintenance result in a waste of time on matters which state administrators are capable of deciding for themselves.

The BPR would, of course, be weakened by the proposal, and this was recognized as a potential problem, especially for the Interstate System:

This raises the issue whether the states, acting jointly, cannot themselves supply the necessary coordinating mechanism. Consideration could be given to forming compacts among neighboring states to consult and plan highway programs affecting their regions. A further possibility is the proposal for a compact among all forty-eight states in the highway field.

Another concern was that pressure might be brought on the State legislatures to build local and rural roads, rather than the important, heavily traveled roads:

This, however, is a matter for the individual state legislatures to decide responsibly and responsively. No gains to democratic state government can be

achieved by irresponsible appeal to high levels of government in order to avoid making necessary local decisions.

The solution to these problems can be found in the determination by the states, acting singly and in concert, to modernize and maintain a system of highways adequate to support present and emerging highway needs.

The Governor's Conference, as it had in the past, adopted the proposal that the Federal Government relinquish the gas tax in favor of the States.

On February 26, the White House held a conference on Federal-State relations and reducing or eliminating costly programs and duplicate taxation. Congressional leaders and Governor Allan Shivers of Texas, president of the Governors' Conference, and Governors Byrnes, Driscoll and Thornton, joined the meeting, which resulted in an agreement to form a commission to address the issue. The President participated in the conference from its start at 10 a.m., until he departed at 1:45 p.m. for a golfing holiday in Augusta, Georgia.

The President, according to a White House statement after the conference, favored a bipartisan commission that would propose legislation "to eliminate hodge-podge duplication and waste in existing Federal-state relations affecting governmental functions and taxation." The President outlined the purpose of the meeting:

For a long time I have thought that there must be a clarification of the responsibilities of the state and federal governments in many fields of public activity. The federal government has assumed an increasing variety of functions, many of which originated or are duplicated in state government.

Another phase of this problem relates to taxation. The existing systems of taxation, both at the federal and state level, contain many gross inequalities insofar as the tax burden between citizens of different states is concerned. There is often a pyramiding of taxation, state taxes being super-imposed upon federal taxes in the same field.

The goal of the commission, the President said, was "to safeguard the objectives" of joint Federal-State programs "from the threat imposed by existing confusion and inefficiency."

On March 30, he sent a message to Congress on Federal Grants-in-Aid. He was seeking, he said, a way "of achieving a sounder relationship between Federal, State, and local governments." The present division of activities had developed over "a century and a half of piecemeal and often haphazard growth." In recent decades, this growth had "proceeded at a speed defying order and efficiency." Reacting to emergencies and expanding public needs, the Federal Government had launched one program after another, without ever taking time to consider the effects of these actions on "the basic structure of our Federal-State system of government."

The Federal Government had entered fields that the President felt were primarily the constitutional responsibility of local governments. More than 30 Federal grant-in-aid programs existed, involving Federal expenditures well over \$2 billion a year. The result was “duplication and waste.” The impact of Federal grant-in-aid programs on the States, he believed, had been especially profound. Whatever good they accomplished, they also complicated State finances and made it difficult for the States to provide funds for other important services.

The President believed that “strong, well-ordered State and local governments” are essential to the Federal system of government. Further, “Lines of authority must be clean and clear, the right areas of action for Federal and State government plainly defined.”

While concerned about this “major national problem,” he wanted to avoid any confusion about the purpose:

To reallocate certain of these activities between Federal and State governments, including their local subdivisions, is in no sense to lessen our concern for the objectives of these programs. On the contrary, these programs can be made more effective instruments serving the security and welfare of our citizens.

To address these issues, the President recommended that Congress pass legislation to establish a Commission on Governmental Functions and Fiscal Resources. The message explained the purpose:

The Commission should study and investigate all the activities in which Federal aid is extended to State and local governments, whether there is justification for Federal aid in all these fields, whether there is need for such aid in other fields. The whole question of Federal control of activities to which the Federal Government contributes must be thoroughly examined.

The matter of the adequacy of fiscal resources available to the various levels of government to discharge their proper functions must be carefully explored.

The President’s message did not mention the Federal gas tax or the Federal-aid highway program, but both fell within the purpose of the message. The Federal-aid highway program, in fact, was the Federal Government’s largest grant-in-aid program. Moreover, the gas tax had long been eyed by the Governors as falling under their jurisdiction. The Governors Conference had repeatedly adopted resolutions calling for the Federal Government to abandon the tax and drop most of the Federal-aid highway program.

Congress approved the President’s request. Under Public Law 83-109, approved by the President on July 10, 1953, the Commission on Intergovernmental Relations was authorized to conduct the study of Federal-State relations. Meyer Kestnbaum, Special Assistant to the President, would head the 25-member Commission.

The Governors were right about one thing. President Eisenhower agreed with them about the need to shift the balance—at least in theory. But the Governors would soon find that he disagreed on one important aspect of the debate: highways.

### **Business Advisory Committee**

Although President Eisenhower would not become fully engaged in a highway initiative until the Grand Plan speech in 1954, he acted on highway safety in July 1953 when he met in the Cabinet Room of the White House with 28 business leaders. He told the leaders that his goal was to save 17,000 lives and \$1.25 billion a year by reducing accidents. According to an account in *Transport Topics* for August 3, 1953:

President Eisenhower told the group . . . he is tired of having three to four times as many persons killed a year on the highways as were killed in Korea. He said the history of efforts to save lives on the highway shows that when something is done on a coordinated basis the accident trend drops sharply.

The president said that something—a truce—had been done about saving lives in Korea and that there is good reason why something should be done about highway accidents.

The article added that Light B. Yost, Director of Field Operations for General Motors (GM), made clear that the modernization of roads, which he said was lagging at the time, would have to be an important element in the safety initiative. Highway modernization was not only an economic and military necessity, but would make a major contribution to highway safety.

Based on the discussions during the meeting, the President appointed a 28-member Business Advisory Committee on Prevention of Motor Vehicle Accidents. The members were selected to represent agriculture, business, labor, women, public officials, organizations (such as service, fraternal, religious, and veterans), and media of public information. GM President Harlow H. Curtice, who had been unable to attend the White House meeting, chaired the Advisory Committee.

According to the BPR's annual report for 1954, the broad purpose of the committee "was to lend the prestige and interest of the President to the attainment of a traffic-safety organization in every community and to promote the effective community application of proved techniques for traffic safety." The BPR provided office space in its General Services Building headquarters as well as staff, printing, and supplies to support the committee.

The President directed the Advisory Committee to hold a three-day Highway Safety Conference in Washington on February 17-19, 1954. The goal of the conference, according to Secretary of Commerce Sinclair Weeks, was "to get an effective safety organization in every community from coast to coast." Secretary Weeks would serve as General Chairman of the White House Conference. Rear Admiral Harold Blaine Miller,

USN (Retired), would serve as Conference Director. Miller, who had been the Navy Department's Director of Public Information until his retirement in 1946, held the same title with the American Petroleum Institute and was Executive Director of the Institute's Oil Information Committee. J. W. Bethea, Director of the National Committee for Traffic Safety, served as Admiral Miller's assistant. As with past conferences, the BPR provided staff support.

On December 11, 1953, the President wrote to the Nation's Governors to request their help:

Dear Governor:

The mounting toll of death and injury on our highways long ago reached a point of deep concern to all of us. It stands before America as a great challenge—humanitarian and economic—and must be met by urgent action.

I have examined the "Action Program for Highway Safety" which you and the other Governors have developed in cooperation with interested organizations and public officials having jurisdiction over highway safety. It is a sound and workable program, but effective citizen leadership is needed to help you put this great crusade into organized action on a scale far bigger than ever before.

Accordingly, I have called a Conference on Highway Safety for Washington next February seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth. The Conference will serve to focus more public attention on the problem and stimulate active leadership in every community.

I should appreciate your designating an appropriate group of your outstanding citizens as a delegation to represent your state. Since the Conference program will be built around seven basic groups—labor, agriculture, business, women, public officials, media of public information and other organizations (service, fraternal, religious, veterans, etc.), I would hope that your delegation will include representatives from each of these categories.

Will you please forward the names of your state's delegates to the Conference on Highway Safety, Room 1107, General Services Building, Washington 25, D.C. Secretary of Commerce Weeks, General Chairman, will send you detailed background information on the Conference shortly.

Naturally, we would be happy to have present all Governors whose schedules and responsibilities would permit attendance. At any rate, I am depending on your active cooperation and support to make this Conference more effective.

Sincerely,

Dwight D. Eisenhower



## **Federal Charter for the National Safety Council**

While at the “Summer White House” in Denver, Colorado, President Eisenhower signed a bill on August 13, 1953, granting a Federal charter to the National Safety Council.

The Council had been formed in 1913 by industrialists on the theory that accidents of all types were preventable. Public Law 83-259 provided a charter to the Council as a nonpolitical organization that would not contribute to or assist any political party or candidate. The Council was one of several public service organizations, including the American Red Cross and the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, granted such charters.

As the Council pointed out, the charter did not grant Federal funds or make the organization part of the Federal Government. The Council would remain a privately financed and operated organization under the control of its directors and trustees. The charter, however, “bestows the prestige of governmental blessing” on the Council and “stamps the Council’s four decades of work and its present stature and character with a seal of approval.”

Ned H. Dearborn, the Council’s President, said, “The new charter is a challenge to better work and greater effort. It offers wider opportunities. And with the help of all those who are now working hard for safety, such an effort cannot fail.”

(The Council remains in operation in 2003. Its mission: “to educate and influence society to adopt safety, health and environmental policies, practices and procedures that prevent and mitigate human suffering and economic losses arising from preventable causes.” Highway safety remains one of the Council’s many concerns.)

## **White House Conference on Highway Safety**

The White House Conference on Highway Safety was held in the Departmental Auditorium. The President was one of the first speakers to address the more than 3,000 delegates during the opening session on February 17, 1954. An account in *Public Safety* magazine said:

When President Eisenhower strode to the speaker’s platform as the red-jacketed Marine Band struck up “Hail to the Chief,” more than 3,000 delegates, packing every nook and cranny of the huge Departmental Auditorium stood up and applauded. Nine governors and Chief Justice [Earl] Warren of the United States Supreme Court flanked the President as he spoke.

After noting the privilege of addressing the conference, he began:

The purpose of your meeting is one that is essentially local or community in character. But when any particular activity in the United States takes 38,000 American lives in one year, it becomes a national problem of the first importance.

Consequently, this meeting was called, and you have accepted the invitation, in an understanding between us that it is not merely a local or community problem. It is a problem for all of us, from the highest echelon of Government to the lowest echelon: a problem for every citizen, no matter what his station or his duty.

I was struck by a statistic that seemed to me shocking. In the last 50 years, the automobile has killed more people in the United States than we have had fatalities in all our wars: on all the battlefields of all the wars of the United States since its founding 177 years ago.

He acknowledged that this was a problem that “by its nature has no easy solution.” He did not intend to get into the technicalities of this “many-sided” problem. However, he felt that the key was public opinion. “In a democracy, public opinion is everything.” He explained:

If there were community groups established that could command the respect and the support of every single citizen of that city or that community, so that the traffic policeman, so that everyone else that has a responsibility in this regard, will know that public opinion is behind him. Because I have now arrived at the only point that I think it worthwhile to try to express to you, because in all the technicalities of this thing you know much more than I do.

If, he said, “we can mobilize a sufficient public opinion, this problem, like all of those to which free men fall heir can be solved.”

He had seen statistics indicating that in 1975, more than 80 million automobiles would be using the Nation’s roads:

Now, the Federal Government is going to do its part in helping to build more highways and many other facilities to take care of those cars. But 80 million cars on our highways! I wonder how people will get to highway conferences to consider the control of highway traffic. It is going to be a job.

But that figure does mean this: we don’t want to try to stop that many automobiles coming—I am sure Mr. Curtice doesn’t anyway—we want them. They mean progress for our country. They mean greater convenience for a greater number of people, greater happiness, and greater standards of living. But we have got to learn to control the things that we must use ourselves, and not let them be a threat to our lives and to our loved ones.

He concluded by emphasizing the importance of mobilizing public opinion in the cause of highway safety. He thanked the delegates for attending and for participating in highway safety initiatives in their communities. “I think you are engaged in something—I know you are engaged in something that is not only to the welfare of every citizen of the United States, but I believe that they realize it.”

According to *Transport Topics*, many delegates arrived late and missed the President's talk or saw it only on the four television sets stationed in the lobby:

Delegates to the White House Conference on Highway Safety came to grips with one of the great problems of their mission even before the meeting got underway. With 3,000 persons converging during the morning rush hour on Washington's Departmental Auditorium, where the general sessions were held, traffic snarls developed on the streets leading to the building, delaying some of the delegates.

Other speakers followed up on the President's themes of public opinion and public involvement. During the opening session, Secretary Weeks said that after 30 years of experience, "we know what the preventive measures are and how to apply them." They were embodied in the Action Program "covering the fields of education, engineering, accident records, enforcement, motor vehicle administration, laws and ordinances, public information and public support." He added, "We will aim at the task of mobilizing widespread and intensive support for crucial parts of the program."

Governor Thornton, also speaking during the opening session, told the delegates:

To achieve and maintain peace on the highways, we don't need to organize the whole population, just those with the energy, interest, intelligence, and persistence to tackle the job and stick to it day after day, year after year, taking each new step as the next stepping stone becomes visible.

He added that, "neither peace among nations nor peace on the highways will come as a miracle. Each is a day-by-day achievement."

Chief Justice Warren discussed the problem from a legal perspective. "Traffic safety is a basic problem of American life," he said. After citing some of the problems caused by accidents, he explained:

Its solution calls for universal understanding of its magnitude and of the factors implicit in it, as well as a determination to eliminate the dangers to life and the economic losses occasioned by negligence, indifference and lawlessness.

One of the most important phases of the problem is the disposition of twelve million traffic cases annually in our traffic courts. Congestion of calendars, haphazard practices and the lack of well conceived programs of enforcement contribute greatly to our difficulties.

Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson pointed out the importance of traffic safety to the farmer:

Farm residents suffer more fatal motor vehicle accidents than any other type of accident . . . . Farm production is vital to America's welfare—now and in the

future. The huge waste of vital farm manpower and material resources caused by accidents must be stopped.

Robert B. Murray, Jr., Undersecretary of Commerce for Transportation, urged public officials to identify the “people and organizations already engaged in highway safety work. They will provide a most important asset in further awakening public opinion to the traffic safety problem.”

Traffic safety experts, such as Franklin M. Kreml, also addressed the conference. Kreml was Director of the recently established Transportation Center at Northwestern University. He told the delegates that developing vigorous public support at the local level could save 20,000 lives and prevent 600,000 injuries a year:

Without organized citizen action, we cannot expect to get sound official action—by the police, courts, engineers, educators, and driver license authorities—and without that, we can’t bring down the death toll.

While receiving the delegates’ suggestions on the final day of the conference, Vice President Nixon acknowledged the seriousness of the problem. “It is more dangerous to go to work these days than it is to work.” He appreciated the participation of citizens, saying, “this is a problem which must be solved on Main Street instead of Pennsylvania Avenue.”

*Public Safety* magazine summarized the highlights of the White House Conference on Highway Safety:

1. Every Governor is urged to call annual governor’s conferences to mobilize safety efforts in the pattern of the White House meetings.
2. The President and 48 governors are asked to proclaim a month-long safety campaign annually to promote public understanding and support of the accident prevention program.
3. Business leaders pledge initiative in developing community support organizations for traffic safety.
4. Labor gives assurance it will be more active in traffic safety by giving assistance on traffic commissions or boards, by affiliation with various civic and service clubs in the interest of carrying the community safety campaign to them, and by whatever service it can offer law enforcement agencies.
5. Recommended that highway and police personnel be built up to minimum standards at least.
6. Suggested that land grant colleges, with their extension and continuing education services, be used to extend traffic safety education, especially among farm groups, and that 4-H clubs, Future Farmers of America and other rural youth groups be included in the planning and action phases of all rural traffic safety programs.
7. Media (Radio and TV, daily and weekly newspapers, magazines, outdoor advertising and motion pictures) offer approximately 50 specific moves

designed to put all its forces—written, oral and visual—back of the President in launching the greatest “Crusade for Safety” in the nation’s history—with every American asked to sign this safety pledge:

“I personally pledge myself to drive and walk safely and think in terms of safety.

“I pledge myself to work through my church, civic, business and labor groups to carry out the White House action program for highway safety.

“I give this pledge in seriousness and earnestness, having considered fully my obligation to protect my life and the lives of my family and my fellow man.”

8. Women’s groups pledge support to traffic law enforcement and cooperation with professional traffic safety people by study of inventory needs, offering local help in planning remedial programs.
9. Recommended that safety education be expanded in elementary and high schools, including driving courses.

### **The President’s Action Committee for Traffic Safety**

During the conference, the Vice President announced that the President would form an Action Committee for Traffic Safety that would include the chairmen of the seven basic committees of the White House Conference on Highway Safety. The Committee met and was designated in the Oval Office of the White House on April 13, 1954. The original members were:

- Harlow H. Curtice, President, GMC, representing business;
- Raymond Leheney, Secretary-Treasurer, Union Label and Service Trades Department, American Federation of Labor, presenting labor;
- Michael J. Quill, President of the United Transportation Workers, Congress of Industrial Organizations, also representing labor;
- Charles F. McCahill, Senior Vice President, Forest City Publishing Company, Cleveland, Ohio, representing media of information;
- Charles B. Shuman, President of the Illinois Agricultural Association, representing agriculture;
- Robert B. Snodgrass, Vice President for local safety organizations of the National Safety Council, representing organizations;
- Mrs. Raymond Sayre of Iowa, past national President, Associated Countrywomen of America, representing women; and
- Governor Dan Thornton, representing public officials.

In a letter that same day to Curtice, the President explained that he did not want to lose the enthusiasm generated by the White House Conference on Traffic Safety. Therefore, he had decided “to have a national committee for traffic safety formed to follow through on the fine work begun by the business group.”

During an organizational meeting, the members selected Admiral Miller as the volunteer director. GM's Yost was appointed secretary, while Bethea became the committee's staff director. Curtice secured private funds to pay Bethea's salary and expenses.

The President's Action Committee for Traffic Safety was, according to the BPR's 1954 annual report, "the first continuing action group ever created by Presidential appointment." The report summarized the purpose:

The group was established to coordinate activities of various autonomous national organizations in the traffic-safety field, and to promote effective citizen support, at the community level, for proven methods of improving street and highway safety.

They would, in short, provide a direct line of coordination from the White House to the grass roots efforts of the communities.

### **Labor Day, 1954**

One of the National Safety Council's promotional activities was pre-holiday fatality predictions intended to alert drivers to the need for safe driving. For Labor Day 1954, the Council predicted 390 fatalities would occur during the holiday.

Just before the holiday, the President issued a statement on September 3, 1954, from the "Summer White House" at Lowry Air Force Base in Colorado regarding the Labor Day weekend:

A year ago, at this time, four hundred and five men, women and children, along with millions of other Americans, were looking forward to summer's last big outing—the Labor Day weekend. Three days later, these 405 were dead.

They died in holiday traffic accidents just as similar accidents had taken 480 lives the year before, and 461 the year before that.

I have just been given a grim forecast. The experts say that, over this Labor Day weekend, before our people go back to work on Tuesday, 390 people will lose their lives in this needless way.

Do we have to let this happen? Have we reached the point where we are helpless in the face of a prediction that almost four hundred of us will kill ourselves or someone else over a weekend?

To everyone who gets behind a steering wheel during the Labor Day weekend I make this appeal:

Let's be careful this weekend. Let's stay alert. Let's remember the simple rules of the road. Let's fool the experts. Let's all be alive next Tuesday.

After the holiday, Council President Dearborn sent a telegram to President Eisenhower:

I am sure you will be glad to know that Labor Day holiday traffic death toll of 364 was lowest for any Labor Day holiday since 1948. This was 26 below our pre-holiday estimate of 390 . . . .

We are sure that the emphasis given the need for greater highway safety over the holiday in your statement of last Friday, and the activities of the President's Action Committee for Traffic Safety, played a big part in the relatively low Labor Day toll. We also are sure that you and your Committee are helping importantly in focusing public attention on the need for day-by-day care, courtesy and common sense on the highway. While the Labor Day toll was still tragically high, we believe that taken in conjunction with the Fourth of July toll and the steady decline in traffic deaths month by month this year it reflects an increasing public awareness of the accident problem and the need for accident prevention.

Dearborn pledged the Council's full and complete cooperation with the President and the Committee "to see that the traffic toll keeps right on coming down.

President Eisenhower replied by telegram:

I deeply appreciate your telegram. No American can take satisfaction in a traffic death toll still so tragically high.

That we lost 26 fewer Americans than experts expected would die in accidents over last weekend should mean to us only that we now have proof that we can, if only we will, largely eliminate this monstrous daily slaughter on the Nation's roads and highways. To that objective I know every responsible citizen will continue to devote himself.

I am delighted to have your powerful statement on behalf of the National Safety Council reiterating its determination to forge steadily ahead in this field.

### **Safe Driving Day**

One of the activities that emerged from the conference was an annual Safe Driving (S-D) Day. Under the concept, the President would ask each Governor to proclaim the day and to appoint State S-D directors. In turn, the Governors would ask each community to appoint a local director.

S-D Day would be preceded by 10 days of intensive education through all channels of communication to alert the public to S-D Day and encourage the support of every individual in the effort. The National Safety Council prepared materials, such as a booklet titled *What You Can Do to Make S-D Day a Success*, to distribute in advance of the day. As *Public Safety* magazine put it, the idea was to "demonstrate traffic accidents

can be reduced materially when all drivers and pedestrians fulfill their moral and civic responsibilities.”

The first S-D Day was Wednesday, December 15, 1954. President Eisenhower played a key part in increasing public awareness. He asked Governor Thornton to “enlist the support of all the Governors” for S-D Day. Working with Governor Robert F. Kennon of Louisiana, chairman of the Governor’s Conference, Governor Thornton asked each Governor to take three actions:

1. Designate a State S-D director to head up the program on a statewide basis.
2. Call upon all mayors and county officials to enlist in the program, asking each to designate a local S-D director.
3. Issue an official proclamation on November 15 designating December 15 as S-D Day, and calling on all organizations to develop definite activity to effectuate the program.

On November 16, President Eisenhower issued a statement about S-D Day:

My fellow citizens:

December 15<sup>th</sup> this year will be Safe Driving Day—a day proclaimed throughout America by your governors, mayors and county officials in cooperation with the President’s Action Committee for Traffic Safety. This Committee is a volunteer group of citizens working, at my request, to reduce fatalities and accidents on our nation’s streets and highways.

All of us agree with the purpose of Safe Driving Day. It is to save lives and to prevent injuries. No endeavor could be more worthy of our universal cooperation. None is more urgent.

On this December fifteenth I hope that every American will help make it a day without a single traffic accident throughout our entire country.

How can we best do this? Three things are essential.

First, let’s each of us make sure that we obey traffic regulations.

Second, let’s follow common sense rules of good sportsmanship and courtesy.

Third, let’s each one of us resolve that, either as drivers or as pedestrians, we will stay alert and careful, mindful of the constant possibility of accidents caused by negligence.

If every one of us will do these three things, Safe Driving Day can be a day without a traffic accident in all of America.



Last year, when I called a national conference on highway safety, Americans were being killed in traffic accidents at the rate of 38,000 a year. A million more were being injured.

This year, although we are driving more cars more miles than ever before, the number of deaths and injuries is smaller. Clearly, we have found that it is not necessary to have more and more deaths and injuries.

I believe we can do even better—and that we must do better. Each of us must help.

Won't you do your part on December fifteenth to help stop death and injury on the highways and roads of America? Let's make Safe Driving Day an overwhelming success, and our nation's standard for the future.

His comment on 1954 fatalities was a reference to the fact that traffic deaths had dropped in October 1954 for the 10<sup>th</sup> month in a row, compared with the same month in 1953.

On December 8, he began his press conference with an appeal for public support:

I have designated December 15 as Safe Driving Day, and I have got a tremendous conviction the United States can do anything it wants to. I would like to get you to transmit requests to all your bosses—editors and the publishers and everybody else, the people that run the radio and television and telenews, and everything. Let's get safe driving in the headlines and prominent places on December 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>, and see what a record we can make for December 15.

He added, "This is, I say, a request, and it is not trying to tell anybody his business."

He filmed a message on December 14, again calling on the Nation to walk and drive cautiously:

At the request of the Governors and other officials, I have designated tomorrow, December 15, as Safe Driving Day.

I have a deep conviction that the United States can do anything to which 160 million citizens set their hearts and minds. If we are determined to have a day without a traffic accident in all of America, we can have it.

So let us see how many highway deaths and injuries we can prevent by obeying traffic regulations, following simple rules of good sportsmanship and courtesy, and staying alert and careful—whether we are driving or walking.

Let us establish an unblemished record of safety on Safe Driving Day, and then make that record our standard for the future.

On S-D Day, December 15, he started a news conference by saying, “Good Morning. I suppose you would expect me to mention that this is Safe Driving Day, and I am really hoping for the very best.” He said he had been notified that a petition was “on the way to my desk, somewhere in the mailroom,” from 20,000 people from one city offering their cooperation. “I hope it is certainly effective, not only in that city but everywhere.”

The results were not as dramatic as had been hoped. On the comparable Wednesday in 1953 (December 16), 60 people were killed and 1,807 people were injured on the Nation’s highway in 4,907 crashes. On the first S-D Day in 1954, 51 people were killed and 966 were injured in 3,935 crashes.

An editorial in *Public Safety* magazine asked if all the effort put into S-D Day had been worthwhile. After citing the statistics, the editorial stated:

Were these nine lives worth all the trouble and shouting? They were if one of them happened to be yours—or that of someone you love!

And the S-D Day bonus went far beyond those nine lives. It benefited several hundred people who would have been injured in traffic accidents on S-D Day had the toll been normal instead of below normal.

And think what the lowered S-D Day toll meant to the thousands of drivers who were spared dented fenders or worse from minor accidents that might have happened that day but didn’t!

And if the nine lives saved still seem pathetically few in terms of the big build-up, just extend that 17.5 per cent saving to the entire year of 1954. If the reduction effected on S-D Day could have prevailed every day of 1954, more than 6,000 lives would have been saved!

The editorial concluded by answering its own question: “What about S-D Day? In our considered judgment, it was tremendously worthwhile.”

An accompanying article observed:

One thing is certain—there were few, if any, people in the United States who didn’t know that S-D Day was going to be observed on Wednesday, December 15, and that every man, woman and child throughout America was expected to play his or her part in making the day a success.

Overall, traffic deaths declined from 38,300 in 1953 to 36,300 in 1954—a drop of 5 percent. It was the lowest total since 1950 despite a 20-percent increase in motor vehicle mileage. The fatality rate had been 6.5 deaths per 100 million vehicle miles, down from 7.1 in 1953 (and 7.6 in 1950). However, the string of monthly reductions had come to a halt in November when fatalities were slightly higher than in November 1953. Fatalities

in December 1954 were again below December 1953 (3,730 in 1954 compared with 3,920 in 1953).

### **Congress Considers the Grand Plan**

Following Vice President Nixon's announcement of the President's Grand Plan for highway improvement on July 12, 1954, the Nation's Governors formed a committee to work with the President's Advisory Committee on a National Highway Program, headed by retired General Lucius D. Clay, a close friend and advisor of the President. The goal was to develop recommendations for transmittal to Congress to use in developing legislation to implement the President's vision. Working with the Governors' committee, the Clay Committee developed a plan to finance construction of the Interstate System. The Federal Government would issue bonds to pay for construction over a 10-year period and use revenue from the Federal excise tax on gasoline to retire the bonds.

President Eisenhower submitted the plan to Congress on February 22, 1955. After explaining how the proposal came about, the President's transmittal letter cited the "inescapable evidence that action, comprehensive and quick and forward-looking, is needed." He listed four points, beginning with:

First. Each year, more than 36,000 people are killed and more than a million injured on the highways. To the home where the tragic aftermath of an accident on an unsafe road is a gap in the family circle, the monetary worth of preventing that death cannot be reckoned. But reliable estimates place the economic cost of the highway accident toll to the Nation at more than \$4.3 billion a year.

The other points were the costs resulting from the poor condition of the road net, the inadequacy of the road net if cities had to be evacuated in advance of an atomic attack, and the increasing cost of congestion as traffic grows.

The President endorsed the Clay Committee's recommendations for financing construction of the Interstate System and other highways, but he recognized that "the vastness of the highway enterprise fosters varieties of proposals which must be resolved into a national highway pattern." Nevertheless, he said, the Clay Committee's report and a pending BPR report on highway needs "should generate recognition of the urgency that presses upon us; approval of a general program that will give us a modern safe highway system; realization of the rewards for prompt and comprehensive action. They provide a solid foundation for a sound program."

The Clay Committee's report, *A Ten-Year National Highway Program*, described the deficiencies of the Nation's highways in detail. Turning to the safety problem, the report stated that "the safety factor must assume large importance." The report quoted the President's comment that the annual death toll was "comparable to the casualties of a

bloody war, beyond calculation in dollar terms.” The report also quoted a report by the Governors’ highway committee:

A simple dollar standard will not measure the “savings” that might be secured if our highways were designed to promote maximum safety, so that lives were not lost and injuries sustained in accidents caused by unsafe highways . . . . But whatever the potential saving in life and limb may be, it lends special urgency to the design and construction of an improved highway network.

Upgrading the Nation’s highways would be an important element in the effort to reduce accidents, as the Clay Committee’s report explained:

Replacement of the obsolete and dangerous highway facilities which contribute to this tragic condition with roads of modern design will substantially reduce this toll. The death rate on high-type, heavily traveled arteries with modern design, including control of access, is only a fourth to a half as high as it is on less-adequate highways. The average motorist today will undoubtedly be surprised to learn that he pays considerably more for insurance to protect himself against accident costs than he pays in State fuel tax and license fees which supply almost the entire financial support for the streets and highways over which he operates.

The President’s proposal received a mixed reaction in Congress. Although support for the Interstate System and other highway improvements was widespread, the financing mechanism conceived by the Clay Committee was widely derided. Even Republican leaders in Congress gave only token support to the concept. As a result, the President’s expectation that action would occur in 1955 would be frustrated. The Senate approved a bill introduced by Senator Albert Gore, Sr. (D-Tn.), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Roads, that differed from the President’s bill in many respects. It was silent on financing because under the Constitution, the House of Representatives initiates tax legislation.

Opposition from highway interests that wanted the Interstate System but did not want to pay for its construction resulted in defeat of the President’s proposal in the House on July 27, 1955. Moments later, the House also rejected an alternative developed by Representative George Fallon (D-Md.), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Roads, based on increasing the gas tax to finance construction on a pay-as-you-go basis. The giant road bill that everyone wanted was dead for the year.

The next day, the President issued a statement expressing his deep disappointment about the House’s action:

The nation badly needs new highways. The good of our people, of our economy and of our defense, requires that construction of these highways be undertaken at once.

There is difference of conviction, I realize, over means of financing this construction. I have proposed one plan of financing which I consider to be sound.

Others have proposed other methods. Adequate financing there must be, but contention over the method should not be permitted to deny our people these critically needed roads.

He expressed hope that Congress would reconsider the matter, but that was not to be in 1955. Congress adjourned without taking further action on the President's Grand Plan.

### **Facing up to the Problem**

In June 1955, Rear Admiral Miller reported on the progress of the President's Action Committee for Traffic Safety. He saw encouraging signs that "we are facing up to the seriousness of the problem and are doing something about it." In particular, the report explained that traffic deaths had declined by 2,000 from 1953 (38,300) to 1954 (36,300). This 5-percent reduction in deaths, the report stated, was the first reduction since 1949 and the first continuous downward trend since World War II.

From its inception, the Action Committee had focused on encouraging the activities of existing national, State, and local organizations to develop a favorable climate in which these agencies and officials could operate most effectively. The goal was community application of the known techniques of traffic safety. To this end, the Action Committee had published a brochure titled *Organize Your Community for Traffic Safety*. It contained case histories of successful community and State programs, along with the recommendations emerging from the White House Conference on Highway Safety.

Therefore, another positive sign was the fact that 250 communities over 100,000 population had organized or made substantial improvement in their safety organizations in 1954. Still, only 114 of the 1,399 communities over 10,000 population had effective safety organizations. Admiral Miller said:

Our hope for a continued reduction in the traffic-accident toll rests on community effort. An effective community traffic-safety program can best be assured through a continuing citizens' organization which will mobilize public opinion in support of the officials' responsible for traffic and safety. It is in this area that we must concentrate our effort in the months ahead.

He added, "So our job is cut out for us if we are to achieve President Eisenhower's goal of an effective traffic safety organization in every community."

A decision was pending on whether to hold another S-D Day. The associations that had participated in S-D Day 1954 were enthusiastic about holding a similar campaign, according to the Action Committee's report, which stated:

The primary purpose of the campaign was not simply a single day of attention to safe driving, but rather an effort to focus public attention on the need for year-around safe driving and walking. Safety people are generally agreed that such

emphasis was effectively given, and that their own continuing programs have benefited.

Admiral Miller explained that the Action Committee and the associations were considering modifications for S-D Day 1955. "We may attempt, for example, to 'keep score' for a period of 10 days on either side of S-D Day (proposed for December 1), thus providing a three-week period in which to measure the effectiveness of the program."

Overall, the Action Committee had identified two fundamental objectives for the year ahead:

1. further broadening and refinement of the committee's efforts to stimulate effective community action, and
2. further development of liaison with other traffic-safety agencies.

To help achieve these goals, the President's Action Committee for Traffic Safety established an Advisory Council including the principal executive officers of national organizations with recognized highway safety programs. Although the Advisory Council would not have a fixed number of members, the initial membership was 21 individuals. Harlow Curtice explained the purpose of the Advisory Council:

The Council will be able to serve effectively in initiating proposals for action to improve highway safety, and will act also as a clearing house and appraisal body for technical ideas submitted to the President's Committee.

The Committee will look to the Council for recommendations regarding national special emphasis programs and research needs in the traffic safety field.

Curtice asked William Randolph Hearst, Jr., editor-in-chief of the Hearst newspaper chain, to serve as chairman of the Advisory Council in recognition of his "constructive leadership" in the area of highway safety. The President wrote to Hearst on June 17, 1955, to thank him for his willingness to serve as Chairman of the Advisory Council to the Committee for Traffic Safety:

It is gratifying to know that you will be turning your interest and broad experience in traffic problems to the urgent traffic safety program.

In extension of this, I should like to ask you, as Chairman of the Advisory Council, to serve also as an *ex officio* member of the Committee. By doing so, you can contribute significantly to strengthened Committee liaison with the national highway safety organizations represented on the Advisory Council. I need not emphasize to you the importance of a close tie between the two groups.

Hearst, who agreed to serve on the Action Committee, was a logical recruit to the President's crusade. In October 1952, Hearst had launched The Hearst Newspapers' Campaign for Better Roads. Hearst later said that, "We saw it as our job to explain the

problem to our readers and to get them to demand and support an adequate highway construction program, nationally and locally."

"We missed no opportunity," Hearst said, "to keep the story in front of our readers." The tireless drumbeat of news on the Nation's road situation included page 1 stories, editorials, cartoons, interviews, photographs, charts, and graphs. Between October 1952 and the end of 1955, the Hearst Newspapers printed nearly 3 million lines on the highway problem—enough to fill an average-size metropolitan daily newspaper for 76 straight days.

Safety was an important element of the highway campaign. Following the White House Conference on Highway Safety, Hearst had published an editorial in the *Chicago Sunday American* and 14 other Hearst newspapers on February 21, 1954. He began:

If the cure for a disease that killed 38,000 and maimed, crippled or injured 1,330,000 others were suddenly discovered, it would be Page One News in every publication in the land.

Or if in the Korean fighting we had 38,000 killed in action and another 1,330,000 wounded, there would have been a nationwide demand for an end to that kind of bloodletting unless, of course, it was leading to definite military results.

And yet, these are the shocking statistics of the toll taken each year and we accept them with a complacency unbecoming to us.

The figures weigh heavily on my mind at the moment because for the past three days I have been attending the White House conference on highway safety in Washington which President Eisenhower addressed Wednesday. Having rejected two prepared speeches, the president talked off the cuff and from the heart, which is when he is at his best.

Representing New York media of information, Hearst found the assignment a "very engrossing and challenging affair." He came away encouraged:

This is a disease for which there is already a serum. The research has already been done and the cure is known. In a few communities the treatment has been applied and the cure accomplished. The job now is to get the serum to every state, county, and community in this country.

The delegates were dedicated to the cause and would "go back to their home towns and get to work immediately to cut the traffic toll by 40 percent." He added, "As I understand it, the men and women gathered here are convinced that the kidding is all over." They would "set up permanent, competently staffed organizations that will use the techniques already tested."

One of those techniques was “rigid enforcement of correct laws.” For too long, Hearst said, Americans had tolerated inadequate traffic laws and loose enforcement because “we have a typical American sympathy for a man who is in trouble because of something he did wrong on the highways.” Juries didn’t like to convict motorists of criminal negligence or homicide because the members felt “there but for the grace of God, go I.” Hearst was convinced these attitudes must change:

Yet, unless our laws, our highway rules, are enforced right down the line we are not going to save those 15,000 American men, women, and children.

This is the sort of thing that is going to be done, that must be done, and your part and mine is to understand the necessity for it and cooperate.

The Hearst Newspapers last week editorially pledged themselves to do everything in their power to make this life-saving campaign successful. Today I wish to repeat that pledge personally in this column of mine.

I said the delegates here were deadly serious about this problem. I think we all are, really. So let’s get to work, and lick it once and for all.

### **Commission on Intergovernmental Relations**

The Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, established in 1953 to study Federal-State relations, completed its work in June 1955 with a report to President Eisenhower. He transmitted the report to Congress on June 28. His cover letter pointed out that 168 years earlier, the Founding Fathers had designed the Federal form of government “in response to the baffling and eminently practical problem of creating unity among the thirteen States where union seemed impossible.” Since then, the Federal structure had been “adapted successfully” until recent years:

In our time, however, a decade of economic crisis followed by a decade of war and international crises vastly altered federal relationships. Consequently, it is highly desirable to examine in comprehensive fashion the present-day requirements of a workable federalism.

Given the “intricate interrelationship of national, state, and local governments,” the President told the Congress that “it is important that we review the existing allocation of responsibilities, with a view to making the most effective utilization of our total governmental resources.” He urged Congress to study the recommendations of the Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, “the first official body appointed to study and report on the general relationship of the National Government to the States and their local units.” To the extent that the recommendations entailed action by the Executive Branch, the President pledged to “see that they are given the most careful consideration.”



The Commission, in examining elements of government, had established a Study Committee on Federal Aid to Highways, one of the perennial points of dispute between the Federal and State governments. The members were:

Clement D. Johnston, Chairman of the Study Committee and President, Chamber of Commerce of the United States.  
Governor Allan Shivers of Texas.  
Frederick P. Champ, President, Cache Valley Banking Company, Logan, Utah.  
Randolph Collier, State Senator, Yreka, California.  
William J. Cox, former State Highway Commissioner of Connecticut.  
Dane G. Hansen, President, Hansen Lumber Company, Logan, Kansas.  
Major General Frank Merrill, Commissioner of Highways, New Hampshire.  
Robert B. Murray, Under Secretary of Commerce for Transportation.  
J. Stephen Watkins, President, J. Stephen Watkins Engineering Company,  
Lexington, Kentucky.

On June 20, 1955, Chairman Kestnbaum submitted the Study Committee's report to the President. The Study Committee agreed about the need for better roads, but its report said "the real issue is not whether we should have better highways, it is how best to get them."

The Study Committee believed that highways served different purposes and should be treated accordingly in sorting out Federal-State relationships. The greatest national responsibility for highways centered on expeditious development of the National System of Interstate Highways. The Study Committee rejected the idea that the Federal Government should build and operate the Interstate System; it recommended "concentration of Federal funds on construction of the Interstate System, together with State participation."

Substantial Federal financial support was essential, with the States bearing "not less than one-half of the construction costs." Toll financing could pay for about one-third of the Interstate System, but beyond that mileage, the Federal Government should provide Federal-aid sufficient "to accomplish its improvement at a rate commensurate with the national welfare and should be allocated in such a way as to give highest priority to correction of the most serious deficiencies."

For other roads, the Study Committee recommended eliminating Federal participation over time. The States could be counted on to address needs off the Interstate System because "the failure of any State or locality to provide adequate highways brings its own prompt and automatic penalties upon the areas involved." States would act in "their own intelligent self-interest" to provide adequate highways "when they understand the responsibility is theirs."

The Study Committee endorsed elimination of the Federal gas tax, a goal long sought by the States. The States, the Study Committee concluded, "have demonstrated ability to tax motor fuels effectively and economically." Repealing the Federal tax would give the

States a potential tax increase of more than \$800 million a year, assuming they increased State taxes by the same amount as the abandoned Federal tax.

At the same time, the Study Committee recommended “without qualification” the continuation of the BPR:

The Bureau should continue to conduct and integrate basic highway research, disseminate the results of research, assemble and collate statistics, and provide technical assistance to the States and their subdivisions.

The BPR also should help plan and stimulate “the articulated network of highways necessary to serve the Nation’s productive and defensive strength.” Moreover, it should help stimulate highway programs “to promote economic stabilization when appropriate.” However, the report recommended that the BPR “substantially reduce most of the present close supervision and inspection of State highway activities.”

In transmitting the Study Committee’s report to the President, Kestnbaum noted that the report had been considered by the Commission, but that the Commission “arrived at its own findings and recommendations.” Actually, the Commission rejected many of the Study Committee’s recommendations. On the most basic issue of the Federal role, the Commission’s report said:

The Commission believes that there is sound justification for federal participation in the improvement of many highways. The Commission generally approves existing legislation, which provides federal aid for primary highways, including interstate routes and urban extensions, and for secondary roads, including farm-to-market roads.

The Commission observed that the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1954 had increased the Federal-aid highway program significantly:

However, there is abundant evidence that the current rate of highway improvement is not sufficient to meet current emerging demands. Failure to meet these needs will seriously affect the national security and the national economy. Humanitarian considerations alone, in terms of reducing the annual toll of highway accidents, call for vigorous action in revamping the unsafe segments of the highway network.

To finance the expanded program, the Commission had been divided, with four members of the 25-member Commission recommending bonds to pay for the Federal financing. The remaining members, including the 10 Members of Congress who served on the Commission, disagreed. The Commission’s report stated:

The Commission recommends that the expanded highway program be financed substantially on a pay-as-you-go basis and that Congress provide additional revenues for this purpose, primarily from increased motor fuel taxes.

The increased tax revenue was justified:

- (1) to give recognition to the national responsibility for highways of major importance to the national security, including special needs for civil defense, and
- (2) to provide for accelerated improvement of highways in order to insure a balanced program to serve the needs of our expanded economy.

As for the bonds favored by the President as a financing mechanism for the Interstate System:

An increase in taxes is preferable to deficit financing as a means of supporting larger highway outlays by the national government. The latter method would result in high interest charges and would shift the burden to citizens of a future generation, who will have continuing highway and other governmental responsibility of their own to finance.

The Commission supported toll roads as a State and local prerogative, but opposed Federal-aid in development of toll roads.

The Commission supported continuation of the BPR:

Over the years, the Bureau of Public Roads has made a notable contribution to highway improvement through technical leadership and the stimulation and coordination of State activity in this field. However, in the light of the maturity and competence of most State highway departments, it appears to the Commission that the Bureau of Public Roads could relax most of its close supervision of State highway work.

On August 2, Congress adjourned for 1955, shortly after the President transmitted the Commission's report for consideration.

### **Safe Driving Day, 1955**

On August 5, President Eisenhower agreed to participate in S-D Day 1955. He wrote to Curtice to let him know that, "I am in accord with the determination of your Committee to broaden its work in stimulating effective community action throughout the country." He noted that his Special Message on Highways in February had been motivated "in large part" by the urgent need for improved highways to save lives." As a result, "In the hope that we shall be able to insure the safety of our families and fellow citizens, I shall be happy to participate in a safety campaign beginning on November 20, 1955, and culminating in S-D Day on December 1."

A national broadcast by the President on November 20 was to launch an intensive 10-day campaign on the theme: "Make *Every* Day S-D Day." A massive campaign was planned

for the 10 days before S-D Day, through all channels of communication, to implant the theme in the public mind.

The National Safety Council's booklet *What You Can Do To Make S-D Day a Success* was provided to businesses, industry, civic groups and government agencies, as well as truckers, insurance companies, and colleges and universities. Advance efforts included publicity releases sent to 6,500 newspapers around the country, and a series of 100-line newspaper ads. In addition, the American Automobile Association distributed posters, bumper stickers, placards for school safety patrols, and other materials through its 750 affiliated motor clubs and branches.

On September 24, the 65-year-old President suffered a heart attack while vacationing in Fraser, Colorado. As a result, he was unable to participate directly in the 1955 campaign. Putting the best face on the situation, *Public Safety* suggested that, "In view of the President's intense interest in traffic safety and his inability to lead the campaign personally, most observers believe the American public will rally in greater numbers than ever before to this S-D Day program."

As S-D Day approached, safety experts knew that the safety record for 1955 was going to be worse than in 1954. October was the eighth consecutive month in which motor vehicle deaths exceeded those in the same month the previous year. The total for the 10 months was 30,980 deaths, compared with 29,080 during the first 10 months of 1954. H. Gene Miller, Director of the National Safety Council's Statistics Division, pointed out in his monthly *Public Safety* article, that because of "zooming motor vehicle mileage," the fatality rate dropped to 6.0 during this period. However, this reduction "affords but little comfort in the face of the increased death total."

Although the President was unable to appear in the planned televised address 10 days before S-D Day 1955, he issued a statement on November 30 from his home in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania:

All over the United States tomorrow, Americans will join in a great National effort to save lives. The occasion will be the second nationwide "S-D Day"—Safe Driving Day.

The immediate objective of S-D Day is to have twenty-four hours without a single traffic accident. The long-range, and more important objective is to impress upon all of us the necessity for safe driving and safe walking every day of the year.

The need is obvious and urgent. Last year, an American man, woman or child was killed in traffic every fifteen minutes. Someone was injured every twenty-five seconds. And, this year, the record is worse: More people are dying; more are injured and crippled.

This tragic situation concerns every State, every community, every American. Actual experience has demonstrated that traffic accidents can be greatly reduced

by proven, year-round safety programs, when these programs have year-round public support.

S-D Day is directed to the development of that kind of support. Literally millions of Americans are participating, through local, state and national organizations, cooperating with the President's Committee for Traffic Safety. This is a volunteer group, appointed by me, to stimulate permanent, effective safety programs in every community.

We know that we cannot solve the traffic accident problem in one day, but we can—and must—start doing a better job.

I appeal, then, to every American to help demonstrate tomorrow that we can—by our own, personal efforts—reduce accidents on our streets and highways. Having shown that we can do so on one day, let us all, as good citizens, accept our responsibility for safety every day in the future.

On S-D Day, December 1, 1955, 89 people were killed on the Nation's highways; on the comparable day in 1954, fatalities totaled 81. Although, according to Miller, deaths during the 21-day S-D Day period were lower than in 1954, "Not even the impact of S-D Day could halt the sharply higher monthly totals." The S-D Day month of December saw a 12-percent increase over the previous year (3,960 motor vehicle deaths compared with 3,530).

The results prompted Goley D. Sontheimer, Director of Safety Activities for the American Trucking Associations, to write in *Transport Topics* about the "apathy of the general public to the appeals, the information and the urging of radio, television and the newspapers." He suspected that hundreds of those who had promoted S-D Day had "thrown up their hands and have given up the fight from an educational standpoint."

Sontheimer speculated that the failure of S-D Day would be a panic that would turn to enforcement at all costs as the answer. "Failure can be laid almost directly to the panic approach—the lack of calm orderly thinking which will strike at the root of the problem." Of the Nation's 70 million licensed drivers, "it is highly probable that at least 20 million of them couldn't pass a driving skill test to save their licenses." Chronic violators comprised about 15 percent of drivers. Sontheimer suggested a solution to the problem posed by "these millions of drivers who are accidents-going-some-place-to-happen":

Rigid driver licensing laws would eliminate most of them if that licensing included periodical re-examination instead of periodical renewal. This with the point system in use for suspension and revocation purposes would go a long way towards solving our problem.

Overall in 1955, fatalities totaled 38,300, compared with the revised final total of 35,586 in 1954. The fatality rate was 6.4 in 1955 (6.3 in 1954). In fact, the toll was the highest since 1941, when 39,969 people were killed on the Nation's highways.

New approaches would be needed to confront what *Public Safety* called a “national disgrace.”

### **Auto Safety Features, 1956**

The September 1955 issue of *Public Safety* described some of the safety features of the automobile industry’s 1956 models. As was the custom, the new cars were “under wraps” until they were revealed in an advertising and publicity blitz in September, but many of the safety features were known when the magazine was prepared.

*American Motors Corporation:* The Hudson and Nash featured “body construction of the shock-absorbing type,” Meade F. Moore, vice president of automotive research and engineering, told the magazine. The new cars would not include seat belts. Moore explained that the company had included seat belts in its 1949 models. “However, the public did not accept them, claiming that seat belts were a ‘nuisance’ in ordinary driving.”

*Chrysler Corporation:* The company stressed its rotary door latches to prevent doors from opening in a crash. The latches included an automatic “take-up” feature “so that the motion of the car always tends to tighten the latches for safety and silence.” Chrysler engineers had developed seat belts that met the functional specifications of the Civil Aeronautics Administration for commercial airlines. The seat belts were available for installation in all Chrysler-made cars.

*General Motors Corporation:* Buick Division would offer seat belts as optional equipment, but would call them “safety belts.” Ivan Wiles, Division General Manager, expressed doubts, however, about how much protection they would afford motorists. Oldsmobile would retain the safety-padded instrument panel it had used in 1955. (Additional information was not available.)

*Studebaker-Packard Corporation:* The company was proud of its new door latch with interlocking lip to prevent separation from the center post.

*Ford Motor Company:* Ford had decided to make safety its theme for 1956 (as described in the October 1955 issue of *Public Safety*). All Ford cars for 1956 would include a five-part safety package. Known as Ford’s Life Guard Design, the package included a deep-center safety steering wheel “which slowly gives way under crash impact,” double-grip rotor-type door locks, optional seat belts that can be anchored to the vehicle with a steel plate, crash cushioning for instrument panels and sun visors, and safety rear-view mirrors with plastic backing to reduce the possibility of glass falling out when shattered.

In summarizing the safety features, the September 1955 article in *Public Safety* stated that of the three factors in traffic—the vehicle, the roadway and the driver—much progress had been made in the first two. “Today’s car reflects the continuing study of a

competitive industry.” Many new features would reduce the seriousness of injury in an accident:

In the final analysis, however, a complete solution of the motor vehicle accident problem rests with the individual—the driver as well as the pedestrian.

### **National Safety Forum and Crash Demonstration**

On September 7-8, 1955, Ford had sponsored the first National Safety Forum and Crash Demonstration in Detroit and Dearborn, Michigan. The October 1955 issue of *Public Safety* reported that 150 specialists in traffic control and accident prevention attended the event.

The first morning included panel reports. The first was by John O. Moore, Director of Automotive Crash Injury Research at Cornell University Medical College. The magazine described Moore’s presentation:

Moore traced the Cornell crash injury project back to the time, 13 years ago, when Hugh DeHaven, an expert in aviation design, began a study of why some people are killed and others virtually unscathed in falls from considerable heights.

DeHaven set forth two basic conclusions: First, those who survived such falls “struck in a position that spread the force of the fall over a large body area, and secondly, their fall ended in an environment which would bend or deform—which would yield to the impact, and in yielding would absorb force.”

These conclusions led researchers into the field of forces as applied to occupants of an automobile which is involved in a crash. And, as the Cornell Specialist summarized, to these two conclusions.

“1. Occupants of a car are approximately twice as safe in case of accident if they remain in the car—hence cars would be safer if equipped with seat belts and safety door latches.

“2. When they remain in the car, they should have the advantage of crash padding on the ‘danger spots’ such as instrument panels, and of energy-absorbing steering wheels to keep the driver from being seriously injured when thrust against the steering column hub.”

Lt. Col. John P. Stapp, Chief of the Aero Medical Field Laboratory at Holloman Air Force Base, described his crash research and reported that the automobile manufacturers were conducting similar crash tests. The magazine summarized:

All this effort, he said, is based on the experimentally demonstrated fact that the human body can survive the forces uninjured if it is properly shock mounted in a non-collapsing enclosure.

Finally, A. L. Haynes, Executive Engineer of Product Study for the Ford Engineering staff, described Ford's 2-year crash test program and showed how it resulted in the development of safety features.

That afternoon, Henry Ford II, President of the Company, presented a check for \$200,000 to the Cornell Crash Injury Project. The check would cover one-third of the program's cost, with Chrysler Corporation and the Federal Government providing the balance.

The second day involved crash testing of four new Fairlanes in consecutive two-car collisions. Test dummies, known as Ferds (for Ford Engineering Research Department), were used to simulate human actions in the crashes. Guests were then shown Ford's Life Guard Design features for its 1956 cars.

As the forum ended with a luncheon in Lovett Hall at Ford's Greenfield Village, Benson Ford announced that the company did not consider these devices as "competitive sales secrets." Specifications were available to any automobile company that wanted them:

I want to point out that gathering this information has taken a lot of diligent and devoted effort at considerable expense. But we want to give this knowledge away to anybody that can use it. We hope other companies will take it, we hope they will use it and, if they can, improve upon it. This is one kind of competition we want to help out.

Ford intended to be as competitive in the field of automotive safety as it was in other areas:

I think if we can get this hard-hitting automobile industry to fight for safety leadership, we can achieve some really wonderful results.

The competition did not develop. Robert Lacey, in *Ford: The Men and the Machine* (Little, Brown and Company, 1986, p. 506) explained that Ford's safety campaign was "a disaster." Motorists concluded that the cars had so many safety features because they were more likely to crash than other cars. Lacey said:

Car advertisements are supposed to promote love, life, and a fast getaway from the traffic lights. Ford's attempts to persuade customers that the purchase of a Ford could save them from a grisly death had the very opposite effect. Ford sales slumped and Chevrolet widened its sales advantage that year by nearly 300 percent.

This lesson, summarized as "Ford sold safety and Chevy sold cars," coupled with American Motors' experience with seat belts in 1949, would be retold many times in coming years.



## Man of the Year

Beginning in January 1928, *Time* magazine has selected a Man of the Year based on the definition that the Person of the Year, as the choice is now called, should be the man or woman who, for better or worse, most affected events during the year. That first year, *Time*'s choice for Man of 1927 had been the aviator, Charles A. Lindbergh. In the years since, the magazine had chosen the great (Franklin D. Roosevelt for 1932, 1934, and 1941), the famous (Wallis Simpson, for 1936, the commoner who married England's King Edward VIII, resulting in his departure from the throne), and the infamous (Adolph Hitler in 1938), as well as military leaders (General Dwight D. Eisenhower for 1944), groups (G.I. Joe for 1950), and a businessman (Walter P. Chrysler for 1928)

In the issue of January 2, 1956, *Time* announced its 1955 Man of the Year. The article declaring the Man of the Year began by pointing out that the Founding Fathers had chosen the words "A New Order of the Ages" for the Great Seal of the United States:

In 1955, this new order of the world—the free, competitive, expanding American economy—not only showed the world the way to a plenty undreamed of only a few years ago, it was also the keystone of the defense of the West against the Communist world . . . .

Because of the success of the American economic system, the U.S. rolled through 1955 in two-toned splendor to an alltime crest of prosperity, heralded around the world. Most of this prosperity was directly attributable to the manufacture and sale of that quintessential American product, the automobile. Some 8,00,000 of them were produced and sold, and a good half were made and marketed by General Motors under the direction of President Harlow Herbert Curtice—the Man of the Year.

In choosing Curtice for the Man of 1955, *Time* explained:

Yet this production alone would not make Harlow Herbert Curtice, 62, the Man of the Year. Nor would the fact that he is president of the world's biggest manufacturing corporation—and the first president of a corporation to make more than \$1 billion in net profits in a year. Curtice is not the Man of 1955 because these phenomenal figures measure him off as first among scores of equals whose skill, daring and foresight are forever opening new frontiers for the expanding American economy by granting millions to colleges, making new toasters that pop up twice as fast, or planning satellites to circle the earth. Harlow Curtice is the Man of 1955 because, in a job that required it, he has assumed the responsibility of leadership for American business. In his words "General Motors must always lead."

"Red" Curtice began his career with GM in Flint, Michigan, as a bookkeeper for the AC Spark Plug Division in 1914. By the age of 21, he was the division's comptroller. When he was put in charge of Buick, he pulled the company out of a slump; it was the fourth

biggest selling car when he became GM Vice President. When President Eisenhower chose GM President Charlie Wilson to be Secretary of Defense in 1953, Curtice became President of the company on February 2..

The *Time* cover image was a portrait of Curtice in front of an America Eagle gripping a steering wheel in its talons.

(*Time* magazine, in its issue of January 4, 1960, identified the 1959 Man of the Year: President Dwight D. Eisenhower. The event that prompted the President's selection was his trip through Europe, Asia, and Africa, "one of breathtaking excitement, high point of a bold venture into personal diplomacy." The faces he saw "were of all shapes and shades," *Time* said, but as they viewed the American President, "they held in common a look—a look of thirsting for the good things that the modern world seemed to promise." As the article stated, "In 1959, after years of hostile Communist propaganda, spectacular Russian successes in space, threats of missiles and atomic war, the throngs of Europe, Asia and Africa cast a durable vote for freedom and liberty. The faces were turned to the U.S. and to the man who had become the nation's image in one of the grand plebiscites of history—Dwight David Eisenhower, President of the U.S. and Man of the Year.")

### **The President's Regional Conferences**

With President Eisenhower still recuperating from his heart attack, Vice President Nixon met with leaders of the National Safety Council early in 1956. After the meeting, the Vice President issued a statement on highway safety that emphasized the importance of implementing the President's Grand Plan. Nixon pointed out that as bad as the safety record was, "it will grow much worse if we don't get better highways soon." He pointed out:

The Bureau of Public Roads of the Commerce Department estimates that right now we have around 61,000,000 motor vehicles operating on the nation's 3.4 million miles of roads and streets. By 1965 we expect to have 81,000,000 vehicles. At present every average mile of road is traveled 470 times a day. In 10 years every average mile will be traveled 660 times a day.

The Vice President referred to the resulting "traffic gluts" and "shrieking horns, exhaust fumes, squealing brakes, traffic jams, collided cars and fractured skulls." He added:

But you don't have to take it any longer. You can join with the President to help restore safety, timesaving and pleasure to motoring.

The key was passage of the President's "all-time record 10-year highway program." He described the main features of the program, particularly the Interstate System, which was "the backbone of the entire program":

The President's plan calls for vast trunk lines, divided in the middle for safety, and ranging from two- to eight-lane facilities . . . . One of the principal features

of the improved interstate system will be many controlled-access highways—with crossings bridged or tunneled and traffic channeled on or off at selected points. Engineers say that such roads are twice as safe as ordinary ones . . . .

The fine new highways will siphon off congested traffic, eliminate accident hazards, speed up safe travel, provide Civil Defense evacuation routes, act as assembly lines from farms, mines, and factories to stores. This will open new attractive territories for homes, industry, shopping centers and recreation, and give millions of American families more freedom and fun in motoring than they've ever enjoyed before.

He encouraged the public to read about “this unprecedented highway improvement plan, discuss it with your friends—and speak up for it.” In this way, the Vice President said, “you can play an effective role in supporting a program that will give the nation and your family the kind of modern highway system every motorist dreams about.”

The BPR's annual report for fiscal year 1956 made a similar point in the section on “Highway Safety.” After referencing the BPR's direct responsibility for improving highway safety, the section's second sentence was: “Possibly its most important contribution was in the design and construction of safer highways.”

The President's Committee for Traffic Safety (which had dropped “Action” from its name) decided to hold four regional conferences “to attract, stimulate, inform and assist those persons who can most effectively create, finance, and conduct state and local citizens' traffic safety organizations.” These would be the first regional traffic-safety conferences held under Federal sponsorship.

President Eisenhower agreed with the plan, which was in line with his idea of enlisting public support. On February 9, 1956, he wrote to Curtice to express concern about the continuing safety problem:

Despite the fact that the 1955 traffic accident record showed a decline on a vehicle-mile basis, the number of fatalities on our streets and highways continues a major national concern.

If we are to reduce traffic fatalities in the months and years ahead, we must move forward more rapidly in applying the traffic measures set forth in the Action Program. Organized public support for these proved techniques was recognized by the 1954 White House Conference on Highway Safety as the primary essential to application by the states and communities. I am convinced that the Conference recommendations for the organizing of public support groups must be fully applied by all states, counties and cities. To re-emphasize this urgency I am heartily in favor of a series of regional traffic safety conferences as you have suggested.

After urging Curtice to organize the conferences as soon as possible, he concluded:

You know my own intense interest in this problem, and you may be certain that you, and those who will work with you in this undertaking, will have my full support.

The President followed up with a letter to the Nation's Governors:

The appalling traffic toll requires our people's determination to increase and to extend the Nation's effort to make our highways safer. On a vehicle-mile basis we have made progress in recent years. But I am sure you will agree that this is not enough. Statistical progress does not lessen the tragedies that every year are visited upon thousands of American homes.

The Action Program, drafted at earlier conferences and strengthened and endorsed by the more than 2,000 delegates who represented the states at the 1954 White House Conference, is definitely a step in the right direction. The question now is—how do we make it more effective?

To this end I am asking that the President's Committee for Traffic Safety consider the desirability of a series of regional conferences to intensify local participation in the Action Program. I am assured that this is possible and that the Chairman of the Committee, Mr. Harlow H. Curtice, will be in touch with you shortly concerning the details.

Your continued cooperation and support will be very much appreciated.

The four conferences were scheduled for:

- Ambassador Hotel, Atlantic City, New Jersey, May 1-2.
- Seville Hotel, Miami Beach, Florida, May 14-15.
- Sherman Hotel, Chicago, Illinois, May 23-24.
- Sheraton Palace, San Francisco, California, May 31-June 1.

In anticipation of the conferences, the Business Advisory Panel of the President's Committee for Traffic Safety developed a three-pronged program to help cut traffic deaths and injuries. T. S. Peterson, President of the Standard Oil Company of California, explained the program in a March 7 letter to Harlow Curtice. The goal was to "encourage the organization of statewide citizen traffic safety groups as a means of strengthening both state and local programs." To accomplish this goal, the panel agreed on three basic steps:

1. A plan of action be inaugurated on a pilot basis in a limited number of states—these states to be selected in consultation with the National Safety Council and other sources.

2. A procedural guide be issued for businessmen (to be completed and ready for distribution at an early date.) This would outline the steps business leaders should consider in setting up statewide citizen traffic safety groups.
3. The Panel's membership be enlarged to provide wider geographic and industry representation on which to base its program.

President Eisenhower did not attend the regional conferences, but filmed a message that was shown at the start of each meeting. His theme was: "team up to check the traffic toll." He said:

We have made some progress but we need an effective translation of public opinion into hard-hitting, continuing action. Everybody is in favor of reducing the tragic, costly, unnecessary toll of accidents, but too few people have done anything about it. Our aim now is to get more people to go to work on this vital problem.

Howard Pyle, the former Governor of Arizona who was a deputy assistant to the President, represented the White House at each conference. During the four conferences, he told a total of nearly 5,000 conferees:

The prospect is all the more tragic when you stop to realize that this wholesale slaughter is unnecessary. The people of the United States could cut traffic deaths in half in six months if they really wanted to.

You have a great responsibility. To you, as state and community leaders, is given a mandate to strike a spark and kindle it into a raging flame—a flame that will cauterize our national wound of traffic casualties.

He endorsed the Action Program, particularly implementation at the State and local levels.

Mrs. Sayre of the President's Committee for Traffic Safety, was assigned the task of summarizing each conference's work. Summing up the needs of cities, she told delegates:

You agreed that a successful safety program depends upon responsible active leaders—people you can count on—who will accept responsibility for doing the things that they—and they alone—can do and be responsible for.

The most important single job for states, counties and cities is to improve the local safety organization or create one if none exists. We don't want the federal government to do this job for us.

She also summarized the recommendations of the conference delegates:

1. Strong, active statewide citizen groups at the state level.
2. Improvement of services offered by official agencies and state organizations to local groups, such as “know-how” for organizing, raising funds and making inventories.
3. Quick action to spark the organization of local citizen groups down to the “last precinct.”
4. Confinement of activities to a few major projects to meet the real needs.
5. Application of “what we already know.”

Delegates from each of the 48 States and the District of Columbia agreed to take specific steps when they returned home to implement the Action Program when they returned home. *Public Safety* magazine listed the commitments in the September 1956 issue, a sampling of which follows:

- Alabama: Pledged to sell a statewide safety program to state leaders and get grass-roots reports on programs adopted.
- Arkansas: Delegates pledged themselves to call on Governor and request formation of a permanent state organization.
- Connecticut: Pledged to hold statewide meeting in June as a follow-up for more and better public support.
- Florida: Pledged their interim legislative committee to hold series of meetings to spark public support for coordinated traffic program statewide, including a uniform traffic code.
- Illinois: Delegates planned to call meetings of delegates (500 of them) attending conference to develop and finance a State citizens’ traffic safety organization.
- Iowa: Delegates planned to call a meeting of Governor Lay’s Committee June 25 to consider the formation of a state public support organization which could give assistance to the formation of state and local citizen safety organizations.
- Kentucky: Pledged to bring civic and business leaders together to organize an effective statewide citizens traffic safety group.
- Louisiana: Pledged to see decisive executive and legislative action on four authoritative recently-completed traffic studies.
- Maryland: Pledged the delegates as an interim working committee to work with the Maryland Safety Commission to carry out an “Action Program.” Follow-up conference.
- Massachusetts: Pledged to work on legislation for safety. Follow-up conference.
- Michigan: Delegates agreed to form a citizen traffic safety action committee. They appointed a temporary committee representing the seven constituent groups of the President’s Committee, plus youth, to call on the Governor to form a permanent committee to stimulate traffic safety organization and action in their communities.
- New York: Pledged follow-up conference, launching of statewide driver-testing and research program. Division of Safety pledged to endeavor to organize, solidify and stimulate the creation of statewide public-support organizations.

- North Dakota: Planned to broaden the program of existing State Safety Council and work for corrective traffic safety legislation. Also planned to establish safety coordinators in each of the State's 53 counties.
- Pennsylvania: Pledged follow-up conference. Decided to make fuller use of the Inventories [Annual Inventory of Traffic Safety Activities developed by the National Safety Council] through the State Bureau of Highway Safety.
- Rhode Island: Pledged follow-up conference to spur organization of community safety councils.
- Tennessee: Delegates agreed to intensify the work of the Governor's Emergency Traffic Committee at the state level, and to organize safety councils at the local level.
- Texas: Delegates agreed to ask Governor to give formal, aggressive leadership in putting Action Program into effect.
- Vermont: Pledged follow-up conference to develop organization of community safety councils.
- Virginia: Pledged follow-up conference, organization of a state safety citizens group and safety council organizations at the local level.
- West Virginia: Pledged publicity program and Minute Man speakers' bureau.
- Wisconsin: Voted unanimously to ask the official agencies and the Governor's advisory committee to conduct jointly, workshop conferences for the purpose of creating a state traffic safety organization.
- Wyoming: A resolution, signed by 22 members of the state delegation to the San Francisco Conference, called on Governor Simpson to name a committee on safety to create awareness of the traffic accident problem, to stimulate public opinion in support of traffic safety measures, and to integrate citizen activities already in operation.

The need for these and other actions was evident. As Gene Miller's monthly article on accident statistics pointed out in the same issue, "Death on the highway maintained its record-breaking pace at the halfway point of 1956." He explained:

June traffic deaths totaled 3,400—the greatest number for that month in history and 14 per cent more than in June last year. The old record was 3,119 for June, 1952.

Traffic deaths for the first six months of the year totaled 18,120, another all-time high for the period and 10 per cent more than for six months last year. The previous high was 17,320 in the first half of 1937.

The article listing the State commitments included the following comment:

This is the blackest year in the history of traffic—a year when citizens can be organized to back traffic safety programs, if they are ever to be organized.

## **The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956**

While the four regional safety conferences were underway, Congress worked on the President's highway program. After Congress had adjourned following failure of legislation in July 1955, the interests that had persuaded Congress to kill all versions of the bill in the House had realized they would have to compromise. With compromises in hand, Representative Fallon introduced a revised Federal-aid highway bill on April 19. It included his modified bill as Title I and a Highway Revenue Act, developed by Representative Hale Boggs (D-La.) and the Ways and Means Committee, as Title II. Title II called for creation of a Highway Trust Fund as a means of crediting all revenue from increased highway user taxes to the new program. The House approved the bill on April 27.

The Senate debated the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 on May 28 and 29. Senator Gore's bill, which the Senate had approved in 1955, was substituted for Title I of Fallon's bill. Title II was the House version as modified by Chairman Harry Flood Byrd (D-Va.) and the Senate Finance Committee. On May 30, the eve of the final regional safety conference, the Senate approved the bill.

The conference committee formed to resolve differences between the two bills completed work on June 25. Both Houses approved the bill the following day.

At the time, President Eisenhower was not in a position to celebrate this triumph with a public ceremony. He had been taken to Walter Reed Army Medical Center on June 7 with severe stomach pain. Following 2-hour surgery for ileitis (an inflammation of the ileum, part of the small intestine), he was still recuperating on June 29 when he signed a stack of bills, including the landmark Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956.

On November 14, 1956, Harlow Curtice wrote to the President about how the 1956 Act would affect highway safety. The legislation, Curtice said, "obviously offers promise of a substantial improvement in traffic safety in addition to other significant benefits." He outlined what the President's Committee for Traffic Safety had decided to do:

This Committee accordingly plans to encourage increasing emphasis by state and community citizens safety groups on the importance to accident prevention of expediting this roadbuilding program. In our judgment, this is just as logical and important a function for such groups as the development of strong public support for universal driver education, sound traffic law enforcement and other safety programs of demonstrated value.

Moreover, it seems quite clear that well-informed and aggressive public support for badly needed construction in all the states continues to be vitally necessary. Although the new federal legislation gives unprecedented and invaluable impetus to such action, much remains to be done at the state and local levels to assure effective implementation of the program.



We therefore feel that increased emphasis on this aspect of traffic safety promotion is wholly in accord with the Committee's mission and will make a timely and important contribution.

Curtice also assured the President that the committee was "continuing to pursue vigorously our other specific objectives." The "current upward trend of traffic fatalities" demonstrated that a "great deal remains to be accomplished." Curtice was, however, "heartened by definite signs of progress in bringing to bear an adequate program."

President Eisenhower replied on November 29:

I was very glad to learn that your Committee for Traffic Safety is planning to give increased emphasis to the need for organized support, in all States and communities, of the accident prevention possibilities of the new highway modernization program.

The 1956 Federal-Aid Highway Act established a "grand plan" for rebuilding of our obsolete road and street system. It provides substantial financial aid to the States over a thirteen year period for construction. In addition, the Federal government will do everything it properly can do to expedite the completion of the program. A safe and efficient road network is absolutely essential to curtailment of death and injury from accidents, as well as to the national defense and to our expanding economy.

Federal action is only the beginning, however. There is likewise the big and complex task of acquiring the necessary rights-of-way, of designing, building and operating the highways. These are responsibilities that belong primarily to the States themselves and their local communities. The 1956 Act wisely carried forward intact the traditional Federal-State partnership which has been so effective in the development of America's highway system.

On a program of this magnitude and urgency, obviously the State and local highway agencies face numerous problems which must be solved as promptly as possible. They will need all the help they can get. Most of all, they will need the kind of informed support which can only come from wide and thorough public understanding.

I am sure that through the leadership of your Committee and the many splendid safety organizations cooperating with it, a timely and valuable contribution can be made to this objective.

### **Highway Safety Study**

Safety had been one of the primary justifications for the Interstate System. However, Congress wanted to go beyond the safety features of the Interstate System to broaden the search for answers to the problem of highway fatalities and injuries.

On April 27, 1956, during debate on the legislation, Representative John A. Blatnik (D-Mi.) introduced an amendment to add Section 118 to the pending bill. It began:

The Secretary of Commerce is hereby authorized and directed to conduct a comprehensive study on all phases of traffic safety, which study shall embrace the causes of accidents on streets and highways, the adequacy of accident records, the economic losses resulting from such accidents, and various factors contributing to the advancement of safety on streets and highways, including, but not limited to, the design and physical characteristics of highways, uniformity of motor vehicle laws and regulations, law enforcement, traffic control, driver behavior, characteristics of motor vehicles, and traffic conditions.

The amendment authorized \$500,000 annually for fiscal years 1957 through 1959 from the BPR's administrative and research funds for the study. The final report of the study was to be submitted to Congress by June 30, 1959.

In introducing the amendment, Blatnik summarized the grim but familiar statistics of the postwar years. He saw the Interstate System as only a partial answer:

Even when the proposed "up to standard" highways and roads are completed, some 12 years from now, auto fatalities will probably be reduced only by some 40 percent on the interstate network. There are many other accident factors involved, especially the complex "human factor," about which too little is known today.

He pointed out that his amendment was in response to a resolution adopted on March 27, 1956, by the Research Committee of the Advisory Council to the President's Committee for Traffic Safety:

It is the consensus of the Research Committee that the Bureau of Public Roads should broaden its current activity in the field of traffic safety research; and further, that this expression be conveyed to the appropriate committee of Congress, and that they be asked to make specific provision for this in current highway legislation, so that traffic safety research may keep pace with the contemplated acceleration in the national highway program.

Blatnik concluded his statement:

The purpose of this amendment is merely to provide for further research and coordinating the research activities that are going on, to give us additional facts, now still unknown.

Representative George A. Dondero (R-Mi.), former Chairman of the Committee on Public Works, pointed out that the committee had considered the amendment and rejected it because the members "concluded that we had enough agencies in the country now

studying the subject of safety, and that there was no need for this amendment at this time and the expenditure of more money.”

The House rejected the amendment.

Senator Margaret Chase Smith (R-Me.) revived the idea of a study on May 21 during the Senate debate on the bill. She said she had been trying for 6 months to gain support for a government study of highway safety. She said the President had responded favorably, but her Senate colleagues had not been supportive. Her Resolution 156, introduced January 5, 1956, which called for a study by the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, had been referred to the Committee, which had not given any consideration to it. When she contacted the Senate Committee on Public Works about Resolution 156, she received no response.

Noting the failure of the Blatnik amendment in the House, Senator Smith said the Advisory Council to the President’s Committee for Traffic Safety had contacted her about support for the study. On May 16, the Advisory Council had provided language for the amendment to her and other supportive Senators. Senator Hubert H. Humphrey (D-Mn.) had introduced the amendment that same day. Although his amendment was desirable, she preferred an amendment modeled on her Resolution 156. She, therefore, had converted the resolution into an amendment, calling on the Secretary of Commerce instead of the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare to conduct the study.

Her amendment began:

The Secretary of Commerce is authorized and directed to make a full and complete investigation and study for the purpose of determining what action can be taken by the Federal Government to promote the public welfare by increasing highway safety in the United States.

The Secretary was to consider six areas:

1. The need for Federal assistance to State and local governments in the enforcement of necessary highway safety and speed requirements and the forms such assistance should take;
2. The advisability and practicability of uniform State and local highway safety and speed laws and what steps should be taken by the Federal Government to promote the adoption of such uniform laws;
3. Possible means of promoting highway safety in the manufacture of the various types of vehicles used on the highways;
4. Educational programs to promote highway safety;
5. The design and physical characteristics of highways; and
6. Such other matters as it may deem advisable and appropriate.

The Senate adopted Senator Smith’s amendment as Section 123 of its Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956. The Conference Committee modified the provision in several

ways, including a change that limited expenditures to \$200,000 and renumbered it as Section 117. The Section 117 safety study, along with any advisable recommendations, was to be submitted to Congress no later than March 1, 1959.

### **The House Special Subcommittee on Traffic Safety**

In June 1956, sparked by the Nation's new road building program, the House of Representatives adopted House Resolution 357, 84<sup>th</sup> Congress:

*Resolved*, That the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, acting as a whole or by subcommittee, is authorized to conduct a full and complete investigation and study of the large increase in traffic accidents on the streets and highways of the United States during recent years, in order to determine (1) the extent to which excessive speed, intoxication, lack of adequate safety inspection of vehicles, insufficiently strict State and local laws, poor condition of highways, and other factors have been responsible for such increase and for the resulting deaths, personal injuries, and economic losses, and (2) the measures which may be taken by the Federal Government to assist in eliminating such accidents or reducing their frequency and severity.

The Committee shall report to the House (or to the Clerk of the House if the House is not in session) as soon as practicable during the present Congress the results of its investigation and study, together with such recommendations as it deems advisable.

For the purpose of carrying out this resolution the committee or subcommittee is authorized to sit and act during the present Congress at such times and places within the United States, its Territories and possessions, whether the House is in session, has recessed, or has adjourned, and to hold such hearings as it deems necessary.

On June 5, 1956, the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce established the Special Subcommittee on Traffic Safety. Representative Kenneth A. Roberts (D-Al.) was appointed Chairman. Other members were Representatives John V. Beamer (R-In.), Samuel N. Friedel (D-Md.), Walter Rogers (D-Tx.), and Paul S. Schenck (R-Oh.).

Roberts, who believed strongly in States' rights, had a reputation for taking on big business. That same year, he had scored a legislative victory when his bill on refrigerator safety was enacted despite industry objections. The new law required manufacturers to include a device allowing the doors to be opened from the inside to prevent the tragedy of children locking themselves inside abandoned refrigerators while playing and suffocating as a result.

Beginning on July 16, 1956, the subcommittee held hearings in Washington and around the country to receive testimony from hundreds of experts in all phases of highway safety. On August 9, for example, the subcommittee was in Chicago to hear from the

American Bar Association, the American College of Surgeons, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the National Safety Council, and the Council of State Governments.

Following the hearings, the subcommittee submitted its first report, *Highway Traffic Safety*, on January 3, 1957. It explained that after hearing from the leading experts in the field, the subcommittee was “encouraged by the intelligent and effective efforts being made in many areas by industry and public agencies to reduce the accident toll.” The report added: “At the same time, it is obvious that more can and must be done.” In this regard, the subcommittee had developed 19 general recommendations:

1. More aggressive action by local communities, counties, and states to implement effectively the Action Program recommendations of the President’s Highway Safety Conference.
2. Expanded basic research into the human factors which contribute to traffic accidents is urgently needed.
3. Uniform traffic laws and local ordinances should be enacted at once in every jurisdiction.
4. Research in highway and traffic engineering should be accelerated and expanded to meet increasing highway and traffic needs.
5. School driver education and adult retraining programs must be expanded.
6. Driver examining, licensing and suspension procedures must be strengthened.
7. Traffic law enforcement and the administration of traffic justice should be improved.
8. Better accident reporting procedures are needed and more effective use of available accident data should be made.
9. Continued and expanded research on safe vehicle design with less emphasis on speed and horsepower is needed.
10. There should be nationwide modernization of all traffic signs, signals and markings.
11. More public education in accident victim care is urgently needed.
12. The need for more adequate financial responsibility laws should be studied.
13. More vehicle inspection laws are needed.
14. Colleges and universities should provide more training in all phases on highway traffic administration, traffic management and control.
15. Closer and more effective coordination among groups working in traffic safety is urgently needed.
16. Improved methods of public traffic safety education are needed.
17. Better means of technical and professional exchange of information on traffic safety must be provided.
18. Organized citizen support for balanced and well-organized safety programs of responsible public officials must be developed and expanded.
19. The traffic safety study should be continued and expanded by the next Congress.

The report noted that the subcommittee had not made any effort “to outline the area of Federal responsibility in promoting traffic safety.” The Federal role thus far had been

“confined largely to research and unofficial efforts at coordination of safety activities.” However, given the large expenditures being made for highway development as well as the Federal role under the Constitution in protecting interstate commerce, the Federal Government had “a definite responsibility in developing and promoting traffic safety.” On this point, the subcommittee concluded:

[The] subcommittee is not prepared to recommend any Federal regulatory legislation dealing directly with traffic safety, as, for example, along the lines of the comprehensive regulatory powers exercised in the field of aviation. But there is widespread demand for action. If the State and local communities continue to lag behind public sentiment in adopting safety measures, there unquestionably will be an increased demand for action by the Congress.

## CHAPTER 3

### MAINTAINING THE FOCUS

#### **Gimmicks and Panaceas**

In 1956, some consideration was given to holding a third S-D Day. The Traffic and Transportation Conference of the National Safety Council, meeting in February in Cincinnati, Ohio, voted to make the month of December a period of special emphasis. This vote was based on the conclusion that S-D Day 1956 had a favorable effect. During the emphasis period, S-D Day reversed the unfavorable trend of the previous 8 months, while accidents increased sharply immediately for the remainder of December.

Other organizations, while offering varying suggestions on the duration, supported another S-D Day: the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the American Automobile Association, the American Manufacturers Association, the Association of Casualty and Surety Companies, the National Association of Automotive Mutual Insurance Companies, the American Transit Association, and the U.S. Navy.

The Advisory Council of the President's Committee for Traffic Safety thought that S-D Day should be postponed until spring 1957. The Advisory Council also planned to consider converting the idea to a month-long safety-emphasis campaign. According to the Advisory Council's report on its discussion:

The postponement was decided upon to permit more study by a committee of the Council as to how a special emphasis program, such as 'S-D Day,' can best be related to the basic purpose of the President's Committee. That purpose is to encourage the formation and strengthening of State and local citizen safety organizations working to apply the known techniques of traffic safety set forth in the Action Program.

Toward this end the Advisory Council wants to be satisfied that the program falls within a period of the year when the maximum number of people will be most likely to read and heed the traffic safety messages brought to them by the various media of public information.

In the end, S-D Day 1955 would be the final S-D Day. Executive Secretary Bethea of the President's Committee for Traffic Safety, discussed S-D Day with reporter Don Ross for a 1961 series of articles on highway safety in the *New York Herald-Tribune*. Bethea said:

This is a great field for gimmicks and panaceas. The President's Committee even had its own gimmick back in 1954 and 1955 when we promoted Safe Driving Day with a lot of razzmatazz. We tried to encourage every community in the nation to go without a traffic death or even an accident for just one day.

Ross noted that, “The results of the two S. D. Days in terms of deaths and accidents, were not encouraging.” He explained that the President’s committee dropped S-D Day “because it feared, among other things, that the ballyhoo attendant upon it was diverting attention from the balanced program for traffic safety that, in the opinion of traffic specialists, offers the best hope of reducing accidents.” Bethea added:

I believe the President’s Committee is a lot more sophisticated now than it was back in those days. Now we spend much of our time trying to convince public officials, legislators and policemen that there are no panaceas.

As Dr. Paul V. Joliet, Chief of the Accident Prevention Program of the U.S. Public Health Service, told Ross, “There are no simple, easy solutions.”

### **Back the Attack!**

When the National Safety Council held its 44<sup>th</sup> annual National Safety Congress at the Conrad Hilton Hotel on October 22-26, 1956, in Chicago, Chairman Dearborn had to confirm what the delegates knew:

I do not need to remind anyone in this room that at this moment the war we are waging on accidents is not going the way we want it to go. The ugly fact is that we have lost ground in this war during the last year—or, as a matter of fact, during the last 18 months. We have suffered reverses that we cannot realistically ignore or minimize.

This is especially true in the field of traffic accidents, where the steady improvements we were making until 18 months ago have yielded to a persistent rise, month after month, in the highway death toll. As we meet here today we face the tragic fact that unless we suddenly hit upon a plan of attack more effective than any we have devised up to this moment, the traffic death toll this year will reach an all-time high in the history of our nation—a dreadful figure of more than 41,000 deaths, and possibly even 42,000!

What was worse, he did not need a “crystal ball” to see the future. His statisticians told him that by 1966 the country would have 80 million vehicles—and 54,000 deaths on the highway. And by 1975, when the total number of vehicles would reach 104 million, “dare we even guess?”

He was encouraged by “an ever-swelling tide of public education” and an increasingly “receptive public.” Plans, he said, were underway for “new and even more effective safety propaganda” to reach the public through every medium:

Even now, we are about to launch a hard-hitting, continuing traffic safety program to be known as *Back the Attack*, which we believe will provide the most comprehensive and effective means yet devised of obtaining united and sustained action by public officials and by citizens against traffic accidents.



The campaign was formally called “Back the Attack on Traffic Accidents!” The campaign grew out of a workshop of the Council’s Traffic and Transportation Conference in February 1956. Participants had the result of the Council’s study of 501 fatal accidents, in which 564 people died, during Christmas weekend in 1955. The main factors in traffic accidents had been excessive speed, drinking, darkness and pedestrian errors. The workshop recommended a month-long emphasis on these factors in December. A followup conference in June recommended kicking off the campaign in December, but continuing it in accelerated form through 1957 based on three cornerstones:

1. Back the Attack—for Citizen Support—Individual and Group
2. Step-up the Attack—for Official Action
3. Join the Attack—for Promoting Participation in Community Safety Organizations.

Therefore, Back the Attack on Traffic Accidents! was designed to achieve a balanced traffic control and accident prevention program.

Dearborn, having begun with a pessimistic look at the future, ended with a positive vision. The day was near, he said, when “the very size of the traffic toll will be a powerful influence in shocking the American people into drastic action.” He saw an “aroused citizenry” demanding action. He saw them insisting on better and safer highways. He saw “developments in engineering design that will make these new highways so danger-proof that only the most willful driver can make them dangerous.”

His vision included the President’s Committee for Traffic Safety:

I see the activities generated by the President’s Committee for Traffic Safety and by the National Safety Council’s field service staff spreading through the nation, state by state and city by city. I see the interest and enthusiasm inspired by the four regional conferences held under the direction of the President’s Committee bring about more and more organized safety effort on the state and local level where it is so badly needed.

Concluding his vision, Dearborn concluded:

Let each and every one of us leave this great National Safety Congress and go back to his home and his job with a firm and unshakeable resolve to make 1957 the year that the war on accidents takes a turn for the better and heads for victory.

America has never lost a fight. With new spirit, new fervor, new confidence and hope and faith, *and with God’s help, it will not lose this one!*

During the preceding months, the Council had lined up the support of organizations around the country for Back the Attack on Accidents! President Eisenhower endorsed the program on September 17, 1956:

For eighteen months, American traffic fatalities have been increasing. If this trend continues through the rest of the year, we shall have the highest motor vehicle death toll in history.

It is shockingly clear that each of us must assume personal responsibility, not only for driving and walking safely, but for supporting our state and local public officials as they seek to enforce and strengthen our safety programs.

The Traffic and Transportation Conference has come forward at a critical time with its year-round program to “BACK THE ATTACK ON TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS”.

I hope all our citizens will take part in this program.

The President’s Committee for Traffic Safety backed the campaign, in part by preparing films to publicize the Action Program. Eight films were prepared in cooperation with the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and the Automotive Safety Foundation:

1. “Alias the Killer”—The kickoff film showed how a community can organize for highway safety. (13 minutes)
2. “Uniform Traffic Laws”—Tells why highway laws should be written so drivers and pedestrians can understand, and obey, them. (5 minutes)
3. “As a Matter of Fact”—Discusses accident investigation and the importance of establishing record bureaus. (5 minutes)
4. “Teach Them Traffic Safety”—About teaching traffic safety and driver education in school. (6 minutes)
5. “Traffic Court, U.S.A.”—Describes the need to modernize traffic courts and eliminate “cracker barrel justice.” (7 minutes).
6. “Traffic Police”—Calls for trained officers, special police divisions, selective enforcement, and a high rate of convictions and penalties. (6 minutes)
7. “Motor Vehicle Administration”—Recommends strong State motor vehicle departments. (6 minutes)
8. “Engineering for Traffic Safety”—Highlights the three-fold job of traffic engineering, namely safety in streets and highways, in traffic operations, and vehicles. (6 minutes)

In addition, the Committee circulated a letter in November to all delegates to the President’s Regional Conferences on Highway Safety asking them to support Back the Attack on Traffic Accidents!

When the results were in, 1956 was the deadliest year to date, up 4 percent from 1955. In all, Miller estimated that 40,000 people died on the Nation's highways, slightly more than the 39,969 who died in 1941. His summary in *Public Safety*, March 1957, explained:

A new record high in traffic deaths for 1956 was almost a certainty until late in the year. Deaths increased steadily until October when a sharp drop (12 per cent) occurred. But the month that turned the tide was December, normally the most hazardous of the year.

December deaths totaled about 4,000, unchanged from December 1955. This checking of the upward trend—coinciding with the opening of the National Safety Council's *Back the Attack on Traffic Accidents* campaign—brought the 1956 total so close to the 1941 record toll that the question cannot be decided until the final figures are tabulated.

The fatality rate was 6.4 per 100 million vehicle miles, the same as in 1955. The magazine illustrated the importance of the drop in fatality rate since 1937, when 39,643 people died on the roads, by pointing out that if the 1937 fatality rate of 14.7 had occurred in 1956, 92,600 people would have died:

It has been said "you don't kill rates, you kill people," but the whittling process that brought the death rate to 6.4 has certainly meant the saving of thousands of lives, the elimination of millions of injuries.

(As final figures came in later in the year, Miller reported that the total for 1956 had been 39,628, below 1941 and 1937.)

The National Safety Council saw the new Interstate System as one of the key factors in maintaining the 1956 downward trend in 1957. On January 4, 1957, the Council sent a letter to its chapters, affiliated councils, and other safety organizations:

Modernization of the Nation's roadway system as provided in the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 is an important step in meeting the emergency of highway traffic facilitation and traffic safety.

By internal and marginal controls built into the roadway, particularly the control of access to and from adjoining property, coupled with adequate police supervision, accidents and deaths resulting from driver errors can be materially reduced . . . . Compared with older type roads, limited access produces a reduction of from 65 to 75 per cent in traffic deaths.

The National Safety Council supports the need for a modern interstate roadway system of limited access highways, and we recommend that state and local citizen safety organizations take a similar position to *Back the Attack* within their states.

Where the limited access feature was being opposed by economic interests or the State was having difficulty providing its 10 percent share of construction costs for the Interstate System, the Council urged its members to help build “strong citizen support” and provide “tangible proof of support” to State legislatures so that safety gains “may be realized.”

### **Safety Features, 1957**

The January and February 1957 issues of *Public Safety* contained a two-part article on “Safety Features of 1957 Cars” introduced in September 1956. The introductory paragraph stated that:

The 1957 cars reflect the attitude of automotive pioneers, show features tending to minimize the seriousness of injury if an accident occurs. Grateful as we all are for these advances, we must not forget that any substantial improvement in the motor vehicle accident problem rests with the individual—the driver as well as the pedestrian.

*General Motors Corporation:* The new models included steering wheels with recessed hubs and redesigned instrument panels with recessed knobs and gauges. The Chevrolet’s Turboglide transmission included a hill retarder to aid braking on down grades. The Buick included padded horizontal rolls at the top and bottom of the instrument panel. A “safety minder” was optional—it would buzz when the car exceeded a predetermined speed set by the driver. The Cadillac included rubber tips on the bumper guards, soft rubber nosing on the top edge of all back seats, and increased visibility via the rearward slant of the windshield pillar post. The Oldsmobile underwent major changes. It was wider and heavier with improved front and rear suspension featuring “counter-dive” to prevent the front from nosing down upon braking. The safety pad on the dash panel was deepened. For the Pontiac, *Public Safety* reported, illustrated the “accent that has been put on safety” by GM. The windshield had been redesigned to increase visibility while the “instrument cluster, with two circular dials and a luminescent ‘Safety Line’ speedometer, are located at an easily readable level.” The 1957 models featured a hooded outside rear-view mirror with a remote control, non-glare tilting inside rear-view mirror, a no-glare textured paint for the top of the instrument panel, and a “prismatic traffic signal light viewer mounted on the instrument panel.” A “Morrokide covered safety pad” was optional for the instrument panel on all models except those with air conditioning.

*Ford Motor Company:* According to *Public Safety*, “Success and public acceptance of the five safety features offered by Ford last year” prompted the company to increase the emphasis on safety. Success could be measured by how many customers ordered the two optional features (crash padding and seat belts) in the 1956 models: “No optional feature in Ford history caught on so fast in the first year.” The five features of the Life Guard Design were being supplemented in the Ford with recessed knobs on the instrument panel, stronger door locks, more resilient instrument and visor padding, and a stronger, wider frame that “places extra steel between occupants and a sideswiping car.” In

addition, wide-flaring frame design provided side rails around the passenger section while roofs had been strengthened. The hood was hinged so it would not flip open accidentally; the hood latch was on the instrument panel. The 1957 Ford had less tendency for front-end dives on quick stops or rear-end dips on rapid starts. The luxury Continental Mark II featured the Ford safety package plus modified power steering control springs to reduce steering effort and eliminate “wheel fight” from rotational shock. The nylon seat belts were bolted to body and frame. The Lincoln included power brakes as standard equipment. The Quadra-Lites (four road lights in vertical pairs) were housed in oval-shaped, chrome-rimmed settings. The Mercury “has really come up with a list of safety firsts.” It had a lower center of gravity to increase stability, improved door locks, specially designed rivets on the seat track to keep the seats from leaving the tracks during a collision, an improved spray pattern for the windshield washer, redesigned brakes, a reflector in the rear bumper pod, new easy-open seat belt buckles, and a zippered children’s safety jacket to keep children from being thrown off balance in sudden stops. The new Mercury Turnpike Cruisers included a variety of safety features, including a special safety steering wheel with a flat top sector to permit the driver to have an unobstructed view of the road and a power-retractable rear window with roof-level, fresh air intakes (“a new approach to car ventilation”).

*Chrysler Corporation:* Chrysler cars (Chrysler, DeSoto, Dodge, Imperial, and Plymouth) included total contact center-plane brakes, energy absorbing steering wheels, padded instrument panels, rear view mirrors that provided unobstructed forward vision and fold out of the way upon impact, recessed outside door handles, padded sun visors, seat belts with simplified installation, safety door latches, and electrically-driven windshield wipers.

*American Motors Corporation:* George Romney, American’s President, welcomed the renewed interest in safety. Citing the seat belts in the 1949 Nash, he pointed out that some innovations do better “on a second try.” The Hudson included single unit body construction; the rigid, integrated unit provided greater safety. Padded instrument panels were standard on all models while the new padded sun visors were standard on custom models and optional on super models. Single unit body construction was included in the redesigned Metropolitan 1500 along with such standard equipment as directional signals, electric windshield wipers, and sun visors. The “airscoop” on the hood had been eliminated to increase visibility. The Nash featured a four headlight system, safety door locks, padded instrument panels and sun visors, and unitized body construction. Similar features were included in the Rambler, which also included strengthened hardtops and additional thickness in the center sub-pillar that ended at the top of the doors. The underbody and side adjacent to the pillar had been reinforced.

### **A Worthwhile Objective**

On January 18, 1957, President Eisenhower met with the Advisory Council of the President’s Committee for Traffic Safety in the White House. Harlow Curtice, who referred to the traffic record in 1956 as “the worst record in our history,” gave the President a report on the Committee’s three major projects:

First, we wholeheartedly endorse the proposal of the Advisory Council that we sponsor a national meeting at which public officials concerned with traffic safety will review and evaluate state and local programs. Such a meeting appears to be unquestionably desirable and it is heartening to know that groups representing public officials were largely instrumental in advancing the program.

Secondly, the Committee concurred in your (Advisory Council) recommendation that another series of regional public support conferences be sponsored in 1958. The benefit of last year's meetings and the obvious need for an effective follow-up make such action highly desirable.

We also reviewed with great interest your progress in developing recommendations for mobilizing safety-minded civic groups to support the new national highway program. Such a project can contribute greatly to the achievement of our traffic safety objective—and will also help assure the many other benefits of an adequate highway system . . . . The President has enthusiastically endorsed the Committee's proposal to undertake this project.

In addition, Curtice gave the President a copy of the report of the Governor's Conference Special Committee on Highway Safety. The Governor's committee, headed by Governor Abraham Ribicoff of Connecticut, covered many topics, including the need for each Governor to strengthen every element of the attack on traffic accidents, establish a committee to appraise the highway safety problem, and review the traffic inventories, such as the traffic safety inventory administered by the National Safety Council.

Following the meeting, President Eisenhower issued a statement:

The death of more than 40 thousand Americans in traffic accidents during 1956 is a shocking record. The tragedy is that most of the accidents could have been prevented. I want to thank your Committee and through you all of the fine organizations which are cooperating in the uphill fight to prevent a repetition of this grim statistic in 1957.

I am hopeful that the traffic safety report formulated by the Governors' Conference will result in prompt and uniform action by state and local governments to curb irresponsible driving. But while the basic authority for traffic control rests with state and local officials, the responsibility for behaving sensibly in traffic is shared by all of us. I hope that every organized group in every walk of life in America realizes it can help promote safety on our roads and streets and stop the wanton killing. There is no more worthwhile objective.

In support of this objective, the President's Committee for Traffic Safety announced plans for six regional traffic-safety seminars for officers of parents' and women's organizations. The seminars grew out of ideas expressed during the regional conferences held the previous spring. They would be conducted by the Traffic Institute of

Northwestern University to provide training in the Action Program, with particular attention to how citizen organizations can help put the program into effect in their community. As Admiral Miller explained:

Traffic safety is everybody's business. And the only way we can reduce the high rate of fatalities and accidents on our streets and highways is to have the full, active cooperation and support of all civic groups.

The first seminar would be held for western States at the University of California, Berkeley, on January 29-31, 1957. The southeastern seminar, the final one in the series, would be held at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville on December 16-18.

### **President Eisenhower on Federal-State Relations**

Traffic safety was still on the President's mind when he addressed the annual meeting of the Governor's Conference on the evening of June 24, 1957, at Williamsburg, Virginia. His primary theme was the balance of power between the Federal and State governments. He said that the Federal Government had "siphoned away State authority," which could not have happened "without the neglect, acquiescence, or unthinking cooperation of the States themselves." He recalled that one of his earliest actions after taking office had been to establish a Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, which had "pointed the way to improvements in areas of mutual concern to the States and the Federal Government." He hastened to add:

Opposed though I am to needless Federal expansion, since 1953 I have found it necessary to urge Federal action in some areas traditionally reserved to the States.

He cited several examples, including classroom shortages, slum clearance and urban renewal, and traffic safety. After commenting on the other examples, he said:

As for traffic safety, this, happily, is still a State and local responsibility. But day by day the American people are paying an increasingly fearful price for the failure of the States to agree on such safety essentials as standards for licensing of drivers and vehicles and basic rules of the road.

The need could scarcely be more acute. Last year's toll of traffic dead soared beyond 40 thousand persons. One and a half million citizens were injured. Many were disabled for life. The estimated cost to the country was 4 billion 750 million dollars.

We simply cannot let this go on. The cost of inaction is prohibitive. Who is going to fill the vacuum? Someone must, and someone will. Are we willing that, once again, it be Washington, D.C.?

I believe deeply in States' rights. I believe that the preservation of our States as vigorous, powerful governmental units is essential to permanent individual

freedom and the growth of our national strength. But it is idle to champion States' rights without upholding States' responsibilities as well.

Returning to the general subject of Federal-State relations, the President proposed an "objective reappraisal and reallocation of those responsibilities" that are best left to the States. He warned that unless the States act, they will create "new vacuums into which the Federal Government will plunge ever more deeply, impelled by popular pressures and transient political expediencies." The Governor's Conference adopted a resolution accepting the President's suggestion.

He followed up his call for a renewed look at Federal-State relations by appointing seven government officials to a Joint Federal-State Action Committee on July 20. The Federal members were:

Robert B. Anderson, Chairman, Secretary of the Treasury,  
James P. Mitchell, Secretary of Labor,  
Marion B. Folsom, Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare,  
Percival F. Brundage, Director, Bureau of the Budget,  
Meyer Kestnbaum, Special Assistant to the President,  
John S. Bragdon, Special Assistant to the President,  
Howard Pyle, Special Assistant to the President for Intergovernmental Affairs

The speech and proposed review by the Joint Federal-State Action Committee reflected the President's bedrock views. In designating the Federal members, he recalled his speech to the Governors' Conference:

I suggested that the Committee should, in designating the functions to be reassumed by the States, also specify when those functions should be assumed, the amounts by which Federal taxes should be reduced, and increases in State revenues needed to support the transferred functions. I added that the Committee might, as the first step, concentrate on a single function or program and pair it with a specific Federal tax or tax amount.

He added that he hoped the Joint Federal-State Action Committee "will result in less centralized and thereby more responsive and efficient government for the American people."

These sentiments reflected his views whenever the subject of Federal-State relations came up, but virtually from the start of his Administration, he had made an exception for highways. He was convinced that the Federal Government had a responsibility for mobilizing State and local officials, as well as the public, in the crusade for better highways, and he acted on that conviction.



## **Backing the Attack!**

During the 13<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of State Governments, held in early December at the Edgewater Beach Hotel, Chicago, safety officials lined up support for the extended Back the Attack on Traffic Accidents!

As Chairman of the Governors' Conference Highway Safety Committee, Governor Ribicoff explained the program to participants. He called the traffic toll "a national emergency that cries out for immediate action on a nationwide basis." He told them that the Governors had launched an "unprecedented crusade to reduce this needless, shameful loss of life." He said:

The Highway Safety Committee of the Governors' Conference, after exhaustive study and conferences with the ranking highway safety specialists, has prepared a report of recommendations. These recommendations have been sent to every governor in the country and are intended to serve as a guide in reducing the carnage on his highways.

The recommendations, like the Action Program, covered such areas as uniformity in traffic laws, reciprocity among States, driver education and improvement, licensing, suspension and revocation procedures, improved enforcement, impartial courts, research, and the enlisting of public support. Governor Ribicoff emphasized that "all three branches of our coordinating system of government—the Executive, the Legislative and the Judiciary—have vital parts to play in achieving highway safety."

Before these recommendations could be adopted, he said, "a State must know what its highway safety program is." The Committee called on every Governor to appraise the State's highway safety needs. An existing agency or a special citizens' committee could undertake the study, but if a citizens' committee were established, Governor Ribicoff recommended that it "should be representative of a cross section of the political, economic, governmental, religious, professional, social and civic life of a state."

Public involvement was essential:

Any highway safety program, of course, must have public support. No one official or group of officials can do the entire job by themselves. The people must want highway safety and be willing to support the necessary enforcement, legislative and educational measures to achieve it. The public, however, will only support something it understands. Information and education programs will help provide this basic understanding. So will the personal and vigorous leadership of the individual governors and legislators and enforcement officials. This leadership will serve to dramatize any highway safety campaign and help capture the imagination of the public and news medias.

The Governors could not, however, do it alone. “They need the support of the State legislators and of the various State officials who deal with highway safety and enforcement.” He said:

I say to you legislators and you office holders who have to stand before the electorate that what is good for your state and good for your country is good politics. Highway safety is good for your state and for your country. And it’s good politics.

*Public Safety* summarized the result of his plea for help:

They called the roll of the states the first week in December—from Alabama to Wyoming—and found legislators, public officials, top management of our state government ready, willing and able to mount an attack on the causes of highway accidents—to line up as one man to *Back the Attack on Traffic Accidents*.

The magazine could report a wide range of activities by the Nation’s Governors in support of the campaign, such as:

- In Delaware, Governor J. Caleb Boggs’s Safety Council was distributing *Back the Attack* material and coordinating State and local efforts to reduce traffic accidents.
- Governor William G. Stratton of Illinois asked for 600 more State police and legislation to put the Action Program into full effect. Secretary of State Charles Carpentier pledged full support for the *Back the Attack* campaign; his tough administration of the State’s driver licensing law was one of the reasons he had been the State’s top vote getter, after President Eisenhower, in the 1956 election.
- Indiana’s new Governor Harold W. Handley, in his initial state-of-the-state speech to the General Assembly, called for 100-percent driver education in high schools, periodic vehicle inspection and periodic driver reexamination in accordance with the basic recommendations of the President’s Committee for Traffic Safety. He also had designated a traffic safety team to promote his concepts.
- Governor Edmund S. Muskie of Maine had been the first State executive to support *Back the Attack*. Every Maine county, city, and town enlisted in the campaign for a balanced safety program based on the Action Program. Every Maine newspaper had pledged to support the campaign, and the State sent TV shots and audio tapes to TV and radio stations stressing the hazards of driving.
- Governor Mennen Williams had lined up 150 key Michigan officials to promote adoption of the Action Program at every level of government.
- Minnesota’s Governor Orville L. Freeman had the Highway Department and State Highway Patrol distributing *Back the Attack* campaign literature. The State’s 116 local safety councils were doing the same.
- Governor Robert B. Meyner held a Governors Highway Safety Conference in New Jersey to promote broad support for traffic safety activities. Groups met throughout the State to enlist every citizen in the cause.

- New York Governor Averill Harriman called on officials and the public to support the campaign. His Division of Safety sent out half a dozen mailings in support of public involvement.
- Governor Luther H. Hodges called officials throughout North Carolina to support the Action Program. The Commissioner of Motor Vehicles had enlisted 200 local leaders to spread the word, while 30 State Highway Patrol sergeants and 30 driver improvement representatives had given Back the Attack campaign material to every civic, educational, industrial, and religious organization.
- In Ohio, Governor C. William O'Neill established a safety team to back a six-point legislative program to enact the Back the Attack campaign: a point system to effect driver improvement, motor vehicle inspection, improved driver education in high schools, licensing of adult driver training school, and an increase in State Highway patrolmen and Driver License Examiners.
- Governor Frank Goad Clement of Tennessee included spot checks on the road, "drunknets," strict enforcement of traffic laws, and increased education programs.
- Wisconsin's Governor Vernon W. Thompson was an enthusiastic supporter who gave high priority to the Annual Inventory of Safety Activities, and used the results of the analyses by the National Safety Council to initiate remedial action at the grass roots level. The Wisconsin State Motor Vehicle Department worked at the local level to implement the Action Program.

The Federal Government was also doing its part to Back the Attack. The Post Office Department, which operated the largest motor fleet in the world, enlisted the Department's 90,000 drivers and 37,000 postmasters and other officials in the campaign. Acting Postmaster General Maurice H. Stans explained:

In keeping with the findings of the President's Regional Conference on Traffic Safety, "that the responsibility for safety programs should be delegated back to the grass roots authorities, the drivers and pedestrians," a "back to the people" trend was started, and the year-round *Back the Attack on Traffic Accidents* campaign was born.

The armed forces also had backed the campaign since President Eisenhower endorsed it. The U.S. Air Force supplemented its highway safety activities with activities in support of the campaign. In Texas, for example, "traffic teams" were established at every base to reduce the accident toll. At Holloman Air Development Center in New Mexico, the Aero Medical Field Laboratory hosted automobile safety experts to demonstrate the effectiveness of seat belts. Dr. and Lt. Colonel John P. Stapp, the center's chief, told them, "The number of military personnel killed each year in auto accidents is a needless waste of manpower to the defense efforts, since a large percentage would be saved if they were wearing seat belts."

The Fifth Army headquarters in Chicago coordinated all traffic control and accident prevention activities within the Back the Attack campaign. Activities included orienting all personnel in safe-driving rules. At Fort Rucker in Alabama, personnel leaving the

base were given a copy of “Words to the Wise,” which ended, “Drive Carefully! Have a pleasant trip—not a death trip!”

The United States Marine Corps cracked down on traffic offenders. The crackdown spared no one “not even officers or ladies,” according to *Public Safety*.

In short, the Back the Attack campaign was being implemented in all 48 States, at the State and local levels, by officials and citizen groups, and by the media. The National Safety Council reported that the initiative was having an effect in the form of a lower death toll. In February 1957, traffic deaths dropped 7 percent (2,540 compared with 2,730 in February 1956), only the third time in 2 years that traffic deaths had decreased. By July, *Public Safety* reported that the Nation had experienced declines in eight straight months. About 250 fewer people had been killed in traffic accidents by that point.

In April 1957, the President’s Committee for Traffic Safety called for a meeting with State and local officials in Washington on December 9 and 10. The goal was to assess the status of traffic accident prevention efforts and set priorities for needed measures. Delegates were to be selected by national organizations of public officials from groups with traffic safety responsibilities. In advance of the conference, delegates would be asked to assess their activities in relation to the Action Program. The results would help determine immediate and long-range needs.

As a followup, the President’s Committee announced it would sponsor regional conferences in 1958—March 11-12 in Atlantic City, New Jersey; April 1-2 in Chicago; April 8-9 in San Francisco; and May 29-30 in Miami Beach.

### **Harlow H. Curtice on Highway Safety**

The Board of Directors of the National Safety Council met on June 27, 1957, at the General Motors Technical Center in Warren, Michigan. Harlow Curtice, a long-time trustee of the Council as well as Chairman of the President’s Committee for Traffic Safety, addressed the Board. He saluted the Council and its important work:

I know of no organization that does a better job of bringing together groups from every major segment of our economy—business and industry, labor, agriculture, education, government and many others—of bringing these groups together and coordinating their efforts to produce effective results. The record speaks for itself.

The 1957 record had been encouraging. He said, “perhaps your efforts and ours are beginning to pay off in fewer accidents and fewer deaths.” He cautioned, however, that “a slight decrease in one year provides no real basis for optimism and could encourage

unwarranted and dangerous complacency.” Although highway safety advocates could not “afford to relax our efforts,” he was concerned about a growing trend:

Unfortunately, there are some well-meaning but unrealistic critics who appear to believe that much of the answer to greater traffic safety lies in radical changes in car design—with the government perhaps as chief engineer.

I say “unfortunately” because the publicity these critics receive serves to divert attention from the areas where the greatest progress can be made.

Of the other factors, progress was being made on one of the most important, highway modernization. “The current federal-state program will certainly make a great contribution to safety as well as to economic progress and national security.” He explained:

The most pressing need now is for intensified effort on the two other major factors in a balanced program. These are enforcement and education. These two are obviously interrelated, because both have to do with the real key to the problem: the driver.

He called for the country to switch from an emphasis on defensive driving as protection against the “reckless and the incompetent”—and go on the offensive:

By that I mean that we need now to stress the importance of taking the offensive when not behind the wheel rather than relying solely on defensive action while driving.

We must encourage the public to back strong action against recklessness and incompetence. This should be done by giving more solid support to sound official measures in the areas of enforcement and driver licensing. It is here that we can hope for the immediate results that it is unrealistic to expect from education.

In closing, he reassured the Board of Directors of GM’s support:

Speaking for General Motors, I assure you again of our continued interest in the vital objectives of the Council and our desire to help you move toward their fuller attainment.

### **Mobilizing the Latent Force**

The President had been expected to address the traffic safety conference in Washington on December 9-10, 1957, but did not do so. Two weeks earlier, he had experienced a mild stroke and was still experiencing difficulty with enunciation. As part of his recovery, he spent a long weekend recuperating at his home in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania,

before returning to Washington on the afternoon of Tuesday, December 9. *The New York Times* reported on the President's return to the city:

The return drive to Washington was made through an occasional drizzle over roads that were generally wet. There were approximately one dozen automobiles following the President's limousine; a few official cars, but mostly reporters and photographers.

A slight sideswipe, a near-miss and a police patrol's admonition about "too many cars two-abreast" led [press secretary James] Hagerty to propose afterward that the number of following cars be limited in the future.

The police warning was given to the President's driver, but the President's car was not involved in the sideswipe or the near miss.

Harlow Curtice opened the conference by calling for sound and aggressive leadership on the part of public officials as the key ingredient in solving the traffic accident problem. In view of widespread public support for highway safety measures, he said, "favorable public sentiment can be translated into effective public support only when there is sound and aggressive leadership to mobilize and direct this latent force." He was convinced that the best device for success was a citizens' traffic safety organization in every State and community.

Governor Ribicoff, chairing the conference, told delegates that accidents could be cut in half, and 20,000 lives saved every year if States would implement a balanced, integrated, continuing traffic safety program:

The governors must spearhead the highway safety campaigns in their states. Policemen, judges, motor vehicle commissioners, and other officials can't function properly unless their governor backs them up. If they know the governor is on their side, they will do a first-rate job.

Governor Stratton of Illinois addressed the conference on the Federal-State issue. He was chairman of the Governors' Conference, a member of the President's Committee for Traffic Safety, and an *ex officio* member of the Joint Federal-State Action Committee. He said:

The responsibility for traffic safety is ours because local and state governments are best fitted for the responsibility. I realize fully there are, nevertheless, those who are concerned lest the drift toward federal intervention—a drift, incidentally, which many of us are currently working to stop—may mean some type of federal policing of the highways in the state.

We would be indeed blind if, because we know this job is our responsibility at the state and local level, we sat back in the false assumption that federal intervention in this field cannot become a reality.

The conference adopted 14 major priorities, as reported by *Traffic Safety* (the National Safety Council renamed *Public Safety* magazine beginning with the July 1957 issue):

- Tightening of driver licensing requirements.
- Expansion of basic research into causes of accidents and congestion.
- Establishing of official traffic safety coordinating committees in every state, county and municipality.
- Stepped-up improvement of highways, utilizing modern design standards, including control of access.
- Standardize penalties for traffic law violators by establishing minimum limits for fines and jail sentences.
- Analyze police traffic law enforcement policies, programs, manpower and equipment.
- Develop widespread public understanding of the advantages and need for control of access on highways constructed under the nation's new road program.
- Adopt vehicle laws, based on the Uniform Vehicle Code, starting with statutes dealing with drivers' licenses, Rules of the Road, accident records and reports, and equipment.
- Resurvey motor vehicle functions and activities in each state, in light of the greatly-expanded highway program.
- Establish in every state an official traffic coordinating committee representing all state departments and agencies having authority and responsibility for traffic control and accident prevention.
- Organize coordinating committees of city or county officials to develop traffic safety programs with the support of local citizens groups.
- Appropriate more funds in states and cities for accident record-keeping equipment.
- Assign full-time professional information officers in each governmental agency concerned with motor vehicle traffic, to handle public information; give the information officers adequate budget and facilities and the personal support of top administrative and legislative officials.
- Accelerate and broaden activity in the field of basic traffic safety research, especially into the causation of accidents.

The four regional conferences in the spring would be designed to support these recommendations.

When the conferences had been announced, 1957 had been a safer year through July than the first 7 months of 1956. August ended the string of lower totals with a 5 percent increase in fatalities compared with August 1956. *Traffic Safety* magazine attributed the increase to the fact that August 1956 included five Saturdays, one of which was the first day of the Labor Day holiday weekend. The number of deaths in September was lower than in the year before, approximately the same in October, and lower in November and December.

As 1957 came to an end, the results were promising. Deaths on the Nation's highways totaled 38,500, down 3 percent from 1956. The fatality rate hit an all-time low of 5.9 per 100 million vehicle miles traveled. Deaths were down 3 percent in rural areas and 2 percent in urban areas. Based on the drop, the National Safety Council calculated that 1,100 traffic deaths had been avoided.

Given the lower fatalities in 1957, the National Safety Council decided to extend its Back the Attack campaign through 1958. President Eisenhower agreed:

It is encouraging to learn that the concerted drive of the National Safety Council has reduced the toll of traffic accidents during the first half of 1957. This shows how public officials and private citizens working together can bring some measure of control to the traffic problem which plagues the nation. But we cannot relax our efforts to reduce the number of injuries and deaths on our highways.

By extending the BACK THE ATTACK safety campaign through 1958, we can continue to build a stronger traffic program in every state and community.

You have my earnest hope for the success of the campaign.

### **Williamsburg Conference**

The President's Committee for Traffic Safety sponsored a conference on February 23-28, 1958, in Williamsburg, Virginia, of leading scientists representing many fields of research, "from psychiatry to city planning and engineering" (as the BPR's 1958 annual report put it) and traffic safety experts to "generate new ideas for traffic-safety research, particularly in the field of human behavior."

Opening remarks were by J. O. Mattson, Vice Chairman of the Advisory Council to the President's Committee for Traffic Safety and President of the Automotive Safety Foundation. He began by quoting Harlow Curtice, who called the investigation into highway traffic behavior "the most urgent and challenging project that confronts the American people today." Mattson agreed, calling traffic accidents "the Nation's No. 1 lifesaving challenge." He recited the familiar but grim statistics: 38,500 lives lost, 1.3 million injured, and an economic loss of \$5 billion.

"I doubt," he said, "that the amount expended for traffic-safety research in 1957 would reach one-half of 1 percent of that figure."

Mattson noted the three things on which highway safety rests: the highway, the vehicle, and the individual driver or pedestrian. He had "great hope" that the conference would shed light on each of the three:

Assembled here is a truly remarkable group of scientists and philosophers. Indeed this Conference is unique, marking as it does the first time that



representatives of so many scientific disciplines have gathered in one room for such an inquiry.

He anticipated “bold new concepts, approaches, and ideas” that would provide “the basis for an orderly pursuit of our ultimate goal.”

Conferees were divided into three groups to study:

1. A systems approach to traffic flow and driver behavior.
2. The psychology of driver behavior.
3. The social context of the automobile, its use and regulation.

*Traffic Flow and Driver Behavior:* A summary of results in the June 1958 issue of *Traffic Safety* indicated that a “vigorous research effort aimed at measuring actual traffic dynamics and actual driver-car behavior in various traffic situations” was needed to “delineate dangerous situations and to indicate ways whereby new road and automobile design and modified traffic rules can increase traffic flow and reduce traffic hazard.” At least four coordinated activities were indicated:

1. Recording and analysis of actual traffic flow;
2. Using simulation of traffic flow to measure the parameters of traffic dynamics;
3. Equipping special cars to measure driver behavior in relation to the traffic environment; and
4. Developing a driver simulator to supplement other measurements.

A “great number of statistical indices” would be needed for “quantitative analysis.” The program would, however, have to be supplemented by a “a methodical development of proper statistical techniques.” The summary explained:

The development of such techniques involves an additional dimension of statistical research; what amounts to a demography or an epidemiology of traffic behavior. This should be carefully coordinated with a continuing, nationwide, standardized, statistical reporting system (corresponding to vital statistics, etc.).

*The Psychology of Driver Behavior:* The second group of conferees found that driver behavior was composed of three elements: input, organization, and output. The summary pointed out that the three need not be investigated separately, because they are linked, but were described separately for convenience:

Input is of external and of internal origin, arising in the external environment or from within the organism. The input is integrated and made meaningful by the organization factor, which selects that which will become output from available motor skills.

Intensive investigation was needed in each area. Research was needed on “what constitutes effective input and the variance of its effect on output.” Organization had to

be studied on the conceptual or symbolic level, requiring “higher integrative processes” and a high degree of driver awareness, as well as on the “more automatic” level, requiring less awareness. How, the scientists wanted to know, can the level of less awareness replace the highly variable activities of greater awareness (in other words, “How may ‘big brother’ controls substitute even for the more automatic driver behaviors?”).

The scientists also wanted to examine motivational systems that affected the organization factor. For example, what are the motivational factors, and how are they influenced by education or social pressure? What are effective rewards and punishments and how can they be incorporated into driver education?

In studying output, a driver simulator was essential. However, the summary noted that, “Research must not be limited to the driver; the passenger and the pedestrian require the same intensive study.

*Social Context of the Automobile:* Researchers concluded that in planning research, they must view auto crashes from several perspectives.

- One was the place of the automobile in American life and its different subcultures in relation to other aspects of the total pattern of life—“historical, political, legal, economic, recreational, technological, familial, etc.”
- Driving was also a social activity “or dynamic social game” by the driver interacting with passengers, other drivers, pedestrians, and law officers while requiring conformity to a “socially defined set of rules whose violation constitutes anti-social behavior.”
- Finally, the researchers saw automobile use as an economic activity that involves “choosing between benefits and costs (including indirect and non-monetary benefits and costs) and how they should be allocated and who is to bear their burden.” They added that the “usual market mechanism” that economists speak of “fails in this area to allocate the burden and to encourage the economizing of human life, time and money.”

To evaluate social context, researchers needed “more valid and reliable measures of traffic safety”; analysis of the relationship between serviceable indices and meaningful subdivision of the population to generate new hypotheses for explaining highway accidents and attempting corrective actions; testing of promising hypotheses, techniques, and devices; systematic examination of the combinations of factors that result in acceptance and nonacceptance of safety measures; and study of possible changes in the allocation of responsibility for traffic regulation and safety among governmental and other agencies.

In summary, the scientists called for additional work in laboratories and field situations, with research supported on a long-range basis, as well as a short-term basis. Further, “To the extent possible, research should be conducted by organizations with a maximum of research talents and a minimum of inappropriate pressures.”

## **Aim to Live!**

Under the leadership of Harlow Curtice, GM launched a national highway safety campaign in early 1958 called Aim to Live! (“Sponsored by General Motors in the Interest of Highway Safety”). The corporation planned to enlist its 19,000 dealers, plus garages and service stations, to promote safety-aimed headlights for all makes and models of cars. The campaign had three goals:

1. Urging every motorist to have his headlights aimed immediately and then have them regularly inspected twice a year.
2. Encouraging motorists to observe the “dimming” rule on streets and highways.
3. Alerting drivers to limit their speed at night so they can come to a safe stop in the vision distance their headlights afford.

The campaign included an educational campaign on the hazards of night driving and tips for driving safely at night.

Curtice urged every motorist to join the “Aim to Live” campaign. “Properly aimed headlights, together with correct dimming habits and alert driving, can help stem the loss of so many lives on our highways at night.”

*Traffic Safety*, in reporting on the campaign, indicated that Curtice said that better night vision had been a vital concern of the auto industry for years. The article stated:

Many years of research preceded adoption of the sealed beam headlamp in 1940, a significant advance in night safety. Similar research produced the four-lamp system now standard on General Motors cars. The four-lamps increase driver vision by at least 15 per cent.

Curtice said that regardless of the type of headlamp, they should all be checked at least twice a year to be sure their aim is not disturbed by normal road shocks, impacts while parking, and “settling in” of suspension systems. He said:

We owe it to ourselves, our families and our neighbors to “Aim to Live.” Sparing minutes for headlight aiming now might spare lives later.

The campaign reflected a larger national initiative, the National Vehicle Safety-Check for Communities, sponsored by the Inter-Industry Highway Safety Committee and *Look* magazine. The voluntary 10-point Safety-Check included brakes, exhaust system, front lights, glass, horn, rear lights, rear-view mirror, steering, tires, and windshield wipers. In 1957, a record 2.6 million vehicles had been checked. For the third straight year, rear lights were found to be the most frequently in need of immediate service. H. D. Tompkins, Chairman of the Committee, explained that, “With *more* people driving *more* vehicles, more miles, and with every fifth vehicle a potential traffic hazard, each motorist must assume individual responsibility for driving safely in a safety-checked car.”

In April, GM presented two other ideas on traffic safety when the Governors Conference Special Committee on Highway Safety met in Detroit at the invitation of the Automobile Manufacturers Association. The Governors visited the GM Proving Grounds and the GM Technical Center to learn about GM's road design plan and its experimental automotive control system. *Automotive News* explained:

GM's road-design plan is aimed at preventing or lessening severity of off-the-road accidents by removing roadside trees and other obstacles, flattening road shoulders and grading parallel drainage ditches and ravines.

For roadside obstacles which cannot be removed, GM suggested properly designed and anchored guard rails to reduce accident severity.

The committee also got a look at the GM Research Staff's experimental Unicontrol car, which eliminates the traditional mechanical linkage between steering wheel and front wheel. The driver simply moved a knobbed four-inch stick beside him to left or right and the wheels are controlled electronically.

To accelerate, he pushes the stick forward. To brake, he pulls it backward. Wires connect the stick and steering, throttle and brakes. An electronic computer and hydraulic power supply comprise the rest of the system.

The Governors also visited Ford's Research and Engineering Center and the Ford test track to learn about the company's work on an electronic device that would warn a driver when he or she is too close to the car ahead of him. The project was one result of an expressway study Ford conducted with the Detroit Department of Streets and Traffic. The study found that speed (driving too fast for conditions) was the major factor in 45.5 percent of the accidents. Cutting in (26.2 percent) and following too closely (20.6 percent) were the other major factors. Over 73 percent of the expressway accidents were on straight sections while accidents on on-ramps accounted for 13.5 percent of the total.

In response to the finding that following too closely was a factor in 20 percent of the accidents, Ford was developing a system that would gauge headlight illumination to determine if a vehicle is too close to the vehicle in front of it. If so, a warning light would flash on the rear of the lead vehicle. Because of reliance on the headlight, the device could only be used at night.

### **Regional Conferences, 1958**

The first of the regional highway safety conferences was held in Atlantic City on March 11. President Eisenhower had recorded a message on film and tape that was played to the delegates at the start of each safety conference:

First, I want to express my personal appreciation to each of you for attending this Conference. You are all taking valuable time from crowded personal schedules.

You have come at your own expense. You have done so because you feel a most commendable sense of responsibility for the always urgent business of Highway Traffic Safety.

Second, I am delighted to see that progress is being made in the fine work you are doing. The National Safety Council reports a saving of 1,100 lives and the lowest mileage death rate in the nation's history in 1957. This is the kind of news we all like to hear.

It proves that something can and is being done to overcome the terrible march of death, personal injury and billions of dollars in property damage on our public roads.

Those in charge of the program for this Conference advise me that you are convened for two primary purposes: first, to bring you up to date on the very latest traffic safety needs. Second, to enlist your leadership in developing the widest possible support for the action programs required to meet these needs. Every year, inventories are made of the traffic-control activities of all the States and cities of the Nation. The most recent inventories show that the average safety performance of all the 48 States has reached only 58 percent of the minimum standards—that is, the States have applied only about half of the basic traffic-safety program. The performance of cities is reported as no better.

If this record is to be improved, every State, county, and local official with responsibility for traffic control must have organized citizen support. This is why you as leaders in your States and communities have been asked to attend this Conference.

So, my plea to you is: give your support in making certain that your safety needs are met as promptly as possible. More importantly, give the leadership that is indispensable if public support is to be effective.

Action is the answer. Cooperation is the means. I am confident you'll give an excellent account of yourselves and the results will be most rewarding.

Former Governor Pyle again represented the President. Pyle told the 900-plus delegates that the United States "simply can't afford the losses we continue to suffer from traffic accidents."

As the conference ended the following day, the Conference Chairman, E. F. du Pont (of E. I. du Pont de Nemours and Company, as well as a member of the Board of Directors of the National Safety Council), summarized the actions recommended by the delegates:

As we anticipated, there was considerable variation from state to state in the priority needs as determined by the delegates. Nevertheless, we find many safety

measures for which rather general support has been expressed:

- (1) Broadening driver education.
- (2) Periodic driver re-examinations, especially for accident and violation repeaters.
- (3) Chemical tests for intoxication.
- (4) Improved enforcement, including such things as the uniform “non-fix” ticket and adequate highway patrols.

He added:

Most groups were emphatic that each state and each city needs a priority plan of traffic accident prevention: a definite, written plan—a plan which informs each group of what is needed—a plan which is coordinated and which has citizens and officials working together.

The Midwestern conference in Chicago on April 1-2 was attended by 1,400 delegates. It opened with a “President’s Breakfast,” during which delegates watched President Eisenhower’s message and a film called “The No. 1 Lifesaving Challenge in America Today.”

The chairman was Calvin Fentress, Jr., Chairman of the Board of Allstate Insurance Company. Although he was proud of the progress made thus far, he said a lasting solution “cannot be realized with lax or presumptuous leadership. It demands vigorous, forthright action and genuine cooperation.”

Harlow Curtice told delegates an intensified research program was urgently needed. Nevertheless, Curtice told delegates, “we know enough right now to be able to cut the accident death toll in half within a relatively short time.” He explained:

Our fundamental problem is not ignorance of what to do. It is failure to get it done on a sustained nationwide basis. We should concentrate more intensively on putting our knowledge to work, instead of casting about for revolutionary new approaches in the mistaken belief that present measures are futile.

After State groups met to discuss each State’s needs, delegates attended interest group meetings for agriculture, business, civic/professional/fraternal, labor, parents/women, and religious.

In the end, Fentress thanked participants:

Such a nucleus of informed leadership is bound to do a real job in selling the programs discussed here. It’s basically up to us to broaden public understanding of this salient fact: that every person, every business, every American institution loses needlessly from traffic accidents. The public must be reminded continually

that our country's economic and national security are being threatened by the material and physical waste of traffic accidents.

Over 700 delegates from 11 western States attended the regional conference in San Francisco on April 8 and 9, with another 600 delegates from 12 southeastern States and Puerto Rico attending the conference in Miami Beach on May 29 and 30. Former Governor Pyle, representing the President, addressed both conferences, telling them, "Scientists have developed synthetic substitutes for all kinds of things. But in the endless fight against traffic accidents, there is no substitute for you—for responsible people."

In San Francisco, Mrs. Sayre (described as "the only woman member of the President's Committee for Traffic Safety" in *Traffic Safety*) told delegates, "Get the facts. Let your clubs know how they can help in the problem." James F. Crafts, President of the Fireman's Fund Insurance Company and Chairman of the Board of the California Traffic Safety Foundation, urged the delegates representing business interests to take an active role:

If business doesn't take an active part in solving the problem of traffic accidents, the federal government may well do the job for us. Traffic is you and your neighbor. When the time comes that you need the federal government to tell you how to use your streets and highways, you are in deep trouble.

In Miami Beach, Clarence Lott, Vice President of Southern Bell Telephone Company, called on citizens to do more than write a check for highway safety. Instead, they should provide "some of their time and talent in guiding and directing the activities" of safety organizations.

As summarized in *Traffic Safety*, delegates to the two regional conferences agreed that the top public support priorities were:

1. Broadening the driver education program;
2. Improving traffic courts;
3. Enacting new traffic laws;
4. Strengthening driver control;
5. Increasing enforcement and
6. Improving accident recording.

### **Tomorrow's Car**

In 1947, Cornell University's Aeronautical Laboratory in Buffalo, New York, began applying its knowledge of airplane safety to the problem of packaging automobile passengers for maximum safety. The operating principle was that the crash of the vehicle was not the cause of injuries; the crash of humans on interior surfaces or the road surface was the cause. The Crash Injury Research Group of Cornell University's Medical College collected injury data on the vulnerabilities of the human body. Because of the

vulnerability of the head, the first tests were on hen eggs, followed by plastic heads. Man-like dummies were constructed (nicknamed “Thin Man,” “Thick Man,” and “Half Pint”).

The Liberty Mutual Insurance Company, which had sponsored the research on the “secondary crash,” joined with the Cornell Aeronautical Laboratory in 1955 to design a Safety Car that would afford maximum protection to passengers. As summarized in the January 1958 issue of *Traffic Safety*, the Safety Car was based on six principles:

First, the car body was made strong enough to prevent most exterior blows from distorting the body against the passengers. Second, doors were secured in such a manner that crash forces could not open them. Thus passengers could not be thrown out and the structural strength of the side of the car body could be maintained. Third, passengers were secured within the car to prevent them from striking objects inside the car during a crash. Fourth, such dangerous objects as knobs, mirrors, and sharp edges were removed.

As *Traffic Safety* noted, these four principles were similar to those used in shipping a delicate package: “use a strong shipping case, fasten lid securely, pack tightly, and remove hard objects from padding.” The two remaining principles were:

The driver’s working environment was improved by increasing visibility, simplifying controls and instruments, and lowering the carbon monoxide of his breathing atmosphere. Also, dangerous objects were eliminated from the exterior of the car to increase the safety for pedestrians.

These principles were embodied in a car that was designed for exhibition around the country to show that styling did not have to be sacrificed for safety.

Some of the features incorporated into the Safety Car, as reported in *Traffic Safety*, were:

- The grille, hood, headlights and bumpers have been redesigned and the radiator ornament has been eliminated to minimize danger to the pedestrian.
- In the wrap-around bumper system, plastic foam material between the front and rear bumpers and the back-up plates absorbs some of the shock energy.
- The car has “accordion” doors, fashioned like telephone booths or bus doors for easy entrance and exit. They are securely closed by three bolt bars which keep the doors closed in a collision.
- Two roll-over bars, one over the front seat riders and one over the rear, have been incorporated into the top of the car body as added support.
- Bucket seats were decided upon to give better lateral support to the hips during a crash. Because the driver has the greatest exposure to an accident, he has been placed in the safest possible position—the center front seat—where he has more car body structure between him and the crash contact points. The other two front seats are placed on either side of the driver, slightly to the rear and slightly lower, so that they do not interfere with the vision or arm movements of the driver.



- All passengers are held securely in their seats to prevent them from becoming flying missiles during a crash. The driver is restrained in his seat by a curved control panel that rocks down into position and locks there. The front-seat riders are similarly restrained . . . . The two forward-facing rear passengers are held in their bucket seats by seat belts . . . .
- Space clearance between front and rear seats prevents the head of any rear passenger from striking a seat during a crash.
- As protection [against “whiplash”], the driver is provided with a pull-up headrest that can be quickly positioned. The other riders are protected by nylon harnesses to support the head.
- Knobs, projections, sharp edges and hard surfaces are absent to a great degree from the interior of the car.
- The driver is still further protected by the elimination of all objects in front of his legs.
- The ordinary steering wheel and steering post . . . has been eliminated. A guidance device which has a much lower injury potential has been devised which the driver pulls back into his lap, where it latches into position. In the new concept of steering developed for the Safety Car, steering power is supplied by hydraulic pressure.
- The instruments are placed well out of the range of the driver’s head and are located just under the line of sight over the hood where they can be seen easily.
- The ventilation . . . efficiently and safely attacks [the carbon monoxide problem]
- The windshield allows almost 180 degree clear vision, and being circular in a horizontal plane, gives no annoying distortion patterns. Furthermore, since it has been designed as the frustum of a cone, the windshield will be well out of the range of the head of any properly restrained front passenger.

*Traffic Safety* summed up the importance of the Safety Car:

The first principle of safety in traffic is to drive carefully, with the car under as nearly perfect control as driving conditions will permit. The Cornell-Liberty Safety Car is an assembly of research design ideas to illustrate means of giving the passengers the best possible protection during the crash period of a traffic accident. These ideas, when improved upon and incorporated into production automobiles, may very well be the means of substantially reducing the ever-rising death and injury toll on our American highways.

### **Safety Slogan Fatigue**

William Ullman, Washington Correspondent for *Automotive News*, reported in the issue of July 28, 1958, that the President’s Committee for Traffic Safety had distributed a study that, in his opinion, was “likely to blow some fresh air into an area which occasionally gets a bit stuffy.” He said:

Despite genuine concern over the high traffic accident rate, auto dealers, editors and others with a stake in the industry frequently suffer from a complaint called

“safety slogan fatigue,” brought on by an overdose of jingles, catchy phrases and righteous warnings asking us not to kill ourselves. Many have suspected that slogans have little effect on accidents, but few have dared to call them baloney in public. That would be like endorsing sin.

The study, *Centering Traffic Safety Communications Around Drivers' Motivations*, had been conducted by the Opinion Research Corporation of Princeton, New Jersey, for the American Trucking Associations Foundation and the Pure Oil Company of Chicago. Ullman summarized the key finding:

“What does a typical traffic-safety slogan like ‘Drive Safely!’ mean to the driver?” asked the survey.

The conclusion: “Nothing, probably.”

Because each person thinks he or she is an above-average driver, motorists assumed the slogans were intended for some other driver.

“Scare” slogans also appeared to be ineffective. Death-toll statistics and images of wrecked vehicles created emotional reactions, but didn’t provide any guidance on what a motorist should do.

Ullman concluded his summary of the study with the following comment:

One group of drivers thought police were “outstanding,” believed safety problems were “all psychological” and favored driver education. This group, oddly enough, was made up of habitual traffic law violators.

### **Conferences for State Legislators**

In addition to the four regional safety conferences, the President’s Committee for Traffic Safety joined with the Council of State Governments to sponsor four regional conferences for State legislators. The conferences, conducted by the Traffic Institute of Northwestern University, had been suggested during the Washington conference in December 1957. Several State legislators expressed the view that a thorough briefing for their colleagues on the traffic safety problem would be helpful.

The conferences were scheduled for the fall, when State legislatures would be in recess, in Atlanta (October 7-10), Boston (November 9-12), Chicago (November 30-December 3), and Salt Lake City, Utah (December 7-10). J. W. Bethea, Executive Secretary of the President’s Committee, said the conferences would be helpful to the States and the individual legislators because the sessions would give them “the basic facts of the traffic situation, the existing programs for reduction of the problem, and the requirements for alleviation which might be within the scope of state legislative action.”

According to *Traffic Safety*, each conference began with an evening get-together, followed by 2 days of discussions on traffic safety. Topics for the conferences included:

- The Traffic Problem—National
- The Traffic Problem in Your States
- Objectives in Driver Licensing
- Street and Highway Traffic and Transportation Planning
- Traffic Education
- Traffic Policing
- Traffic Law Adjudication
- State Traffic Services to Communities
- Motor Vehicle Inspection
- Traffic Legislation
- Traffic Accident Investigation and Record Keeping
- A Coordinated Study Program to Meet Future Needs of Motor Vehicle Ownership and Use

### **Ike Stops By**

With off-year elections for the United States Senate and House of Representatives to be held on November 4, President Eisenhower was in Chicago on October 22, 1958, for a radio and television address at the Republican Party's "Fight-to-Win" dinner rally. The rally was in the International Amphitheatre, where he had received the party's presidential nomination in 1952. Speaking at 8:30 pm, he told his fellow Republicans:

Here in Chicago, six years ago, I embarked, with all of you, upon a crusade for sound, efficient, progressive, trustworthy government here at home, and peace with justice in the world. That crusade I believe now, as I did then, is profoundly important to every one of us, to our country, to nations everywhere.

He listed the results. The Korean War ended. Communist military aggression frustrated. The mightiest army in history "reorganized for still greater efficiency and power." Power returned to the States, with 260,000 fewer Federal Government employees. It was a long list of achievements, but he asked the Republicans to consider just four:

- Runaway inflation checked;
- The St. Lawrence Seaway, so significant to this great inland empire;
- New nationwide super highways;
- A new Cabinet Department for Health, Education, and Welfare.

"Now," he added, "on the eve of election, we review and reaffirm that kind of purpose and accomplishment."

The President hoped to see a Senate and House with Republicans in the majority. The Democrats, he said, were dominated by a radical wing that had so split the party as to

“constitute two distinct parties, masquerading under one name.” Because of this “built-in antagonism, the opposition is incapable of offering America anything except deadlocked government.” The choice in November, therefore, was significant. (After the November 4 election, the Democrats would retain control of Congress.)

After leaving the rally, he went with Illinois Governor Stratton and Senator Everett Dirksen of Illinois to the Conrad Hilton Hotel, which was the site of the 1958 National Safety Congress. With the annual banquet underway, the President was met at the entrance to the hotel and escorted to the grand ballroom by George C. Stewart, Executive Vice President of the National Safety Council and a former General on Eisenhower’s staff during World War II.

In brief remarks to the surprised delegates at 9:40 pm, the President began with a reference to Walter F. Carey, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the National Safety Council:

This evening I have been doing a bit of politicking, but your Chairman was kind enough to invite me in for a moment as I went back to my hotel, with the idea that he knew I would want to say to you a word of thanks and appreciation for the work you do in preserving human values and human life in this country.

I can’t imagine any more important work, any more challenging work, and I would truly like to be sufficiently eloquent to express the feelings of the American people to those who give of their time, their effort and their substance to help our great country to be stronger and safer—who belong, in short, to the National Safety Council.

So, with this word of thanks for the warmth of your greeting, and for the work you are doing, I shall now say goodnight and be on my way.

Another important event of the National Safety Congress resulted from the fact that Ned H. Dearborn, the Council’s President, had reached the mandatory retirement age and would soon leave office. The congress, therefore, included many tributes to Dearborn, who would become president emeritus.

When the Council’s Board of Directors met on January 13, 1959, they elected former Governor Pyle, who had been a deputy assistant to the President since 1955, to succeed Dearborn. Although Pyle had served two terms as Governor of Arizona, he had begun his career in advertising and as a program manager and vice-president of KTAR, the Phoenix radio station. He also had been an overseas correspondent in the Pacific during World War II. *Traffic Safety* summarized his activities since moving to Washington:

For the past three years, Mr. Pyle has been a presidential assistant directing policy and liaison in the field of federal-state-local government relations. He was primarily responsible for development of the work of the new Joint Federal-State Action Committee for stronger, more responsible local government. He was the

planning contact man for the President's Committee for Traffic Safety and the keynoter at many of the national and regional meetings called by the committee.

Chairman Carey said of the choice:

The National Safety Council is delighted that Mr. Pyle could accept an invitation to become its president. He has a background of public service and safety that fits him admirably for his responsibilities with the Council. We feel that we have been extremely fortunate in finding an ideal successor to Ned H. Dearborn.

### **The Chairman Steps Down**

Harlow Curtice, who had been President of GM since February 2, 1953, reached GM's mandatory retirement age of 65 on August 15, 1958. By tradition, GM's Board of Directors made no decision on a new President until after the 65<sup>th</sup> birthday of the current President.

As a result, industry observers were surprised when his retirement occurred on September 1, 1958, sooner than expected. Under Curtice, the company had expanded its physical facilities and captured more than 50 percent of the new-car market 1954 through 1956, but was challenged by labor strife and new threats from imported cars, particularly Germany's Volkswagen.

According to *Automotive News*, the departure of "Red" Curtice was met with "mixed emotions":

Curtice, at times as [fiery] as his nickname, has been hailed as a great leader on the one hand and also as a tyrant obsessed with a mania for sales at any cost.

The Board replaced not only Curtice but the leadership structure. Frederick G. Donner assumed the post of Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer. John F. Gordon became President. By combining the position of Chairman with that of the Chief Executive Officer, GM was returning to the era of Alfred P. Sloan, Jr., who had held the joint titles from 1937 to 1946.

The President's Committee for Traffic Safety also saw a change in leadership. Curtice resigned from the committee he had headed since its formation in April 1954. President Eisenhower appointed William Randolph Hearst, Jr., as the new Chairman.

### **Congress Considers Safety**

In 1957, the Congress had considered several highway safety bills. One had been introduced by Senator A. S. Mike Monroney (D-Ok.), who proposed a Presidential Commission to attack the highway safety problem by pulling all the Federal Government's scattered safety activities together. Senator Lyndon B. Johnson (D-Tx.), the Majority Leader, proposed to establish an automobile and highway division in the

Department of Health, Education and Welfare. The idea, the Senator explained, was to “promote research into improved designs for automobiles and highways to prevent accidents and to reduce the severity of injuries in automobile accidents.” The unit would also collect information on accidents and conduct a public education campaign.

Chairman Roberts proposed a bill to provide Federal grants to States for driver-education programs in public schools. He recognized that cost would be a problem, but he had no qualms about the need for Federal involvement in highway safety:

The Federal government has a very great responsibility in protecting life and property in interstate commerce . . . . Even a modest start will be well worth the cost involved.

None of the bills made it into law that year.

As the second session of the 85<sup>th</sup> Congress began in January 1958, several bills were pending. Senator Monroney joined with Chairman Roberts in a new version of the 1957 bill. The Senator had decided against a Presidential Commission; he and Roberts now supported a Joint Congressional Subcommittee on Traffic Safety. William Ullman of *Automotive News* explained why:

The senator changed his mind about letting the Administration handle the job for several reasons. Presumably, the prior existence of the President’s Committee on Traffic Safety, a group whose work has left the senator far from excited, influenced his decision. In addition, he wanted to recognize the important work already accomplished by Roberts.

Chairman Roberts had introduced a bill that would require new cars to include “reasonable safety devices” as prescribed by the Secretary of Commerce. In introducing the bill, Roberts explained that testimony before the subcommittee “indicates that scientists and engineers know which structural parts of the automobile are causing the greatest amounts of injury to persons in accidents. Action must be taken to remove these unnecessary hazards.” He was particularly concerned about “proper packaging” to prevent interior contacts with the head, neck, and chest of passengers. “There is especially a need for greater use of padding in the interior of the car in order to help reduce head injuries for all persons. Padding should not be a costly optional item for just the wealthy few.”

The Special Subcommittee completed its first legislative act when President Eisenhower signed Public Law 85-684 in October 1958. It granted congressional consent to States to negotiate and enter into interstate compacts for the promotion and carrying out of highway traffic safety. According to *Traffic Safety*:

This law is intended to activate states into voluntary cooperative effort in establishing and carrying out traffic safety programs. The Act specifies the following objectives: uniform traffic laws, driver education and training,

coordination of traffic law enforcement, research into safe automobile and highway design and research on the human factors affecting traffic safety.

Representative Beamer of the subcommittee had introduced the initial House Joint Resolution 221 to reflect the view that the States had the authority to address the safety problem. The resolution had been passed unanimously by both House of Congress.

Although the Roberts bill on “reasonable safety devices,” such as seat belts, was not enacted in the 85<sup>th</sup> Congress, the Chairman had not lost interest in the idea. In October 1958, Chairman Roberts addressed the Governors’ Safety Conference. He intended to introduce the bill in the 86<sup>th</sup> Congress, he said. Before the Governors and in other speeches, Roberts claimed that seat belts could save 10,000 to 20,000 lives annually. He considered industry action “weak and lacking in purpose” and charged that “so far, the industry has not even seen fit to build attachment points for seat belts at the factory.”

His presentation irritated Ullman, a longtime observer of the auto industry, who took exception to the claim that the industry was “dragging its feet” on installation of safety belts. In his weekly “Automotive Washington” column in *Automotive News* for October 27, 1958, Ullman described the industry’s safety activities, including its cooperation with the Special Subcommittee. Ralph Isbrandt of American Motors Corporation, Ullman pointed out, had explained to the subcommittee that many drivers removed the safety belts installed in the 1949 Nash cars. Isbrandt said:

The motoring public at that time appeared to be just not ready for seat belts. This experience proved, without a doubt, that seat belts would not “sell themselves” and that to promote their use successfully would require an extensive educational campaign.

GM’s Charles A. Chayne agreed. Although GM had unveiled its first seat belt in 1951, surveys indicated that “public acceptance and demand might be extremely small.”

Robert S. McNamara, Vice President of Ford Motor Company, informed the Special Committee that Ford had contributed \$200,000 to Cornell’s crash-injury research on seat belts in 1955. He agreed that seat belts could reduce deaths and injuries, but was disappointed “that the acceptance of seat belts by many groups interested in highway safety has been slow.”

Ullman, noting that Roberts had not informed the Governors of Ford’s involvement in the Cornell research, pointed out the industry’s involvement in seat belt research:

Roberts described the Air Force rapid-deceleration tests at Holloman Air Force Base as “heroic” but didn’t tell the governors that GM had given the Air Force its own snubber-testing equipment for the tests.

Roberts failed to tell his audience that most of what is known today about auto seat belts is the result of research conducted or financed by the automobile industry.

He did not say that the industry has contributed more than \$1.5 million during 1958 alone to outside agencies engaged in traffic research, including another grant of \$150,000 to support the crash-injury study program at Cornell . . . .

Roberts omitted any mention of the Automotive Safety Foundation and the Inter-Industry Highway Safety Committee, both of which the auto industry helped to found and continues to support.

But while he carefully skipped over every safety activity of U.S. auto makers, Roberts had plenty to say about Detroit's presumed ability to block safety legislation.

Blaming the industry for failure of the safety device bill, Ullman said, "is, of course, ridiculous."

Ullman suggested that Detroit auto executives "make a safer target for a Congressional safety investigator than those American motorists who actually have the accidents. Motorists, after all, would like to blame somebody else for their accidents, too, and they represent a lot of votes."

As the 85<sup>th</sup> Congress came to an end, some discussion was given to expanding the Roberts Subcommittee to a Joint Senate-House Committee on Traffic Safety, as suggested by the Monroney-Roberts bill. However, when the 86<sup>th</sup> Congress assembled in January 1959, the Roberts Subcommittee was eliminated. Instead, Representative Roberts became Chairman of the new Subcommittee on Health and Safety under the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce. The new subcommittee had a broader jurisdiction than its predecessor, covering public health and quarantine, food and drugs, hospital construction grants, and safety (including air safety and air pollution as well as highway safety).

In 1958, highway safety advocates could report progress in reducing fatalities on the Nation's roads. The total of 36,981 deaths continued the decline reported for 1957.



## CHAPTER 4

### THE FEDERAL ROLE IN HIGHWAY SAFETY

#### **BPR's Report to Congress**

Secretary of Commerce Sinclair Weeks, who had served as Secretary since the start of the Eisenhower Administration on January 21, 1953, left office on November 10, 1958. Three days later, Lewis L. Strauss became Secretary.

On February 27, 1959, Secretary Strauss submitted a report to Congress by the BPR on *The Federal Role in Highway Safety*. The report had been required by Section 117 of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, which called for a study of actions the Federal Government could take “to promote the public welfare by increasing highway safety in the United States.”

On page 1, the report noted that, “The alltime high of 39,969 highway deaths in 1941 has not been exceeded since, in spite of a doubling of the miles driven since that year.” Much of the improvement in recent years had occurred in urban places, where deaths had dropped by a third, mainly in reduced pedestrian deaths. Mainly because of single-vehicle accidents, deaths in rural areas had increased.

Looking ahead to 1975, the report said the prospects were grim. By then, registered vehicles would total 110 million, licensed drivers would equal 111 million, and traffic volumes would increase to 1.1 trillion miles of travel. Although the study estimated the fatality rate would decline from 5.6 in 1956 to 4.6 in 1975, total highway deaths were estimated to reach 51,000 and an economic cost of \$9.5 billion. The study predicted that between 1958 and 1975, more than 700,000 people would be killed in motor vehicle accidents and the total economic cost would exceed \$120 billion.

Adding up the fatalities since the introduction of the motor vehicle, the study said nearly 1.3 million people had been killed and 3 to 4 million had suffered permanent injury. Total property damage to date was estimated to be \$90 billion.

Despite progress in holding deaths below 1941 levels, the report called for an “improved approach.” It said:

The bulk of the attack on the present annual level of 37,000 fatalities, millions of injuries, and billions of dollars in economic loss is still typified by “cut and try” measures and by propaganda of uncertain worth. Involving nearly our entire population as pedestrians, 82 million as vehicle operators, 68 million automobiles, trucks, and buses, and 3.4 million miles of roads and streets, traffic mishaps continue to store up enough emotion, grief, and financial despair to support many kinds of individual, local, State, and Federal actions aimed at greater safety. Some of these have enjoyed and genuinely deserve success. But for the most part,

past efforts have badly underestimated the complexity of the fundamental problem. And in this underestimation, too much reliance has been placed on the results of all too limited trials and evaluation of a welter of prevention campaigns.

Efforts had been aimed at defective drivers, inadequate vehicles, and deficient highways, but “only occasionally at combinations of these factors.” The report stated that continuing the “uncontrolled trial and error among the vast numbers of preventive possibilities promises no real solution.” Basic and applied research to determine the basic causes of accidents was essential, as was research into the design and application “of the far-flung network of solutions that is so certainly needed.” The report said:

Most of all, officials representing government, highway users, and the automotive, insurance, and associated industries urgently need to reach closer agreement on their respective objectives and obligations. They must decide, or face having it decided for them by a public now gradually awakening, how and to what extent they will share in a comprehensive, coordinated highway-safety plan—one truly of their own devising and one that respectfully recognizes the unique competencies and capacities of its many participants.

Government had a clear role to play, but the “front line of the attack must always be manned by State and local authorities.” Of the Federal role, the report said:

Federal authority by its Constitution is too remote and unwieldy for direct intervention as such, though continued frustration with the restricted gains has promoted serious consideration of this course among national legislators.

The problem has clearly reached a dimension that warrants consideration of every strategy short of any direct Federal action which might well impair the effectiveness of or impinge on the authority and responsibility of State and local governments.

In this view, the report was consistent with President Eisenhower’s longstanding concern about Federal encroachment on State and local authority. As a result, the principal challenge of the Section 117 study was to determine how the Federal Government “can properly take steps leading to a better focus for highway-safety efforts, instill greater working coordination in the weapons of attack, and most effectively develop a cooperative realm of official leadership responsibility.”

#### *History of National Highway Safety Conferences*

The report summarized the history of national highway safety conferences beginning with the National Conference on Street and Highway Safety sponsored by Secretary of Commerce (and future President) Herbert Hoover in 1924. The conference identified eight areas for intensive study: statistics, traffic control, construction and engineering, city planning and zoning, insurance, education, the motor vehicle, and public relations. A second Hoover conference in 1926 produced a model for a uniform vehicle code that was

considered one of the most important achievements of the two conferences. The 1959 report explained:

Consisting initially of three separate acts dealing with registration and certificate of title, with licensing of operators and chauffeurs, and with rules governing the operation of vehicles on highways, the suggested code was the outgrowth of principles agreed upon at the 1924 Conference.

The uniform code had been updated over the years, but other recommendations stemming from the 1924 and 1926 conferences and a 1934 conference “have been less durable, largely because the professional ability and concern accorded the area of traffic legislation was not available or organized as a continuing function.”

Another outgrowth of the early conferences was the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), the first edition of which was produced in 1935 through the joint work of AASHO and the American Engineering Council. The MUTCD standards for traffic signs, signals, markings, and islands were adopted through Federal highway legislation, initially in Section 12 of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1944, which required:

On any highway or street hereafter constructed with Federal aid in any State, the location, form, and character of informational, regulatory, and warning signs, curb and pavement or other markings, and traffic signals installed or placed by any public authority, or other agency, shall be subject to the approval of the State highway department with the concurrence of the Public Roads Administration; and the Commissioner of Public Roads is hereby directed to concur only in such installations as will promote the safe and efficient utilization of the highways.

The PRA adopted the MUTCD for purposes of Section 12. (Today, similar language can be found in Section 109(d) of Title 23, United States Code.)

The report summarized the post-World War II resurgence of traffic “and, with it, an unprecedented problem in traffic fatalities, accidents, and economic loss,” resulting in President Truman’s Highway Safety Conference beginning in 1946:

Committees of the Conference reported recommendations and findings in eight broad areas of attack: laws and ordinances, accident records, education, enforcement, engineering, motor-vehicle administration, public information, and organized public support. The Conference adopted an Action Program for implementing the recommendations of the committees, and representing what it deemed a positive and practical, balanced program of measures necessary in the interest of highway safety.

The report added that the Conference met periodically after the 1946 conference, “revising on occasion its action program and issuing annual reports of progress.”

In 1954, President Eisenhower's White House Conference on Highway Safety was "the heir and successor" to the Hoover and Truman Conferences. The report highlighted the President's Committee for Traffic Safety, formed "to lend the prestige and interest of the President to traffic safety" in 1954.

The broad purpose of the Committee has been to develop an effective follow-up program in support of the Conference objectives and of the recommendations of the seven Conference groups—agriculture, business, labor, media, public officials, civic organizations, and women's groups. It continues to encourage the formation or strengthening of State and local organizations devoted to the application of the techniques of traffic safety set forth in the Action Program, a program of traffic-safety measures, including engineering, education, and enforcement.

#### *Driver Records Clearance Center*

The report estimated that 1 million driver licenses were in revoked status (1 percent of all drivers) because these drivers "are a poorer than average risk." Although the States did not issue licenses to applicants who were known to have a revoked license in another State, over half the States do not check and those that do "have difficulty obtaining adequate cooperation from other States."

A clearance center to identify all drivers with suspended or revoked licenses was needed to avoid "inadvertent official action" to issue a new license:

The cumbersome and relatively ineffective clearance processes now in use among the States would be replaced by a modern, efficient, and economical service to those participating. New electronic data processing equipment now makes such an operation practicable at relatively small cost.

The center, the report explained, "would be available to all States on a voluntary basis, enabling them to check the status of all applicants before issuing driver licenses."

#### *Interdepartmental Highway Safety Board*

One of the major recommendations of the report was its call for an Interdepartmental Highway Safety Board:

A pressing need exists for greater stimulation of official highway safety efforts. The establishment of an effective national focus for leadership, guidance, and a degree of coordination among the many phases of the official highway safety effort is justified by the large accumulating toll of life and property lost in street and highway accidents.

The President's Committee for Traffic Safety, working through its Advisory Council, "has been most useful" in rallying and directing "the many powerful forces in private life

dedicated to traffic-accident reduction.” However, the report said, a parallel group was needed in government circles “for developing official programs of equal breadth and for encouraging their application at all levels of government, Federal, State, and local.” The report recommended that the Secretary of Commerce serve as Chairman, with other members including the Secretary of Defense; the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare; the Chairman of the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC); and the Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

### *Safety Factors: The Human Element*

The importance of the human element in highway safety was under debate:

Most presentations on the cause of the highway accidents assign responsibility for 9 out of 10 accidents to the driver, with the other one being split about equally between the vehicle and the roadway . . . . This assignment may have some value in the promotion of safety consciousness, but it is of doubtful validity in any broad study of the traffic-accident problem.

Assigning such a high responsibility to the driver “overlooks the fact that the interaction between all three creates the successful or unsuccessful driving performance.”

In examining the human element, two classes of relevant characteristics were usually considered. One class included characteristics required by all drivers by the very nature of driving: sensory functioning, perception, judgment, analysis, decisionmaking, integration, and translation into action. The second class involved characteristics specific to the individual: intelligence, personality, emotion, and social forces. The two classes were not “wholly independent and they appear to interact to determine the accuracy and efficiency with which any individual carries out the task of driving.”

Extensive research had been conducted, according to the report, into the visual characteristics of drivers (visual acuity, glare recovery, color sensitivity and adaptation to darkness) and correlation of motor functions with driving, but the research had not identified any major problems. By contrast, “little experimental research has been done on the more fundamental factors of perception, judgment, analysis, decisionmaking, etc.” Given the complex nature of the driving experience, these areas held promise for research.

The report summarized findings on accident proneness (“Accident repeaters are often social delinquents or irresponsibles, as shown by ratings of credit agencies and supervisors.”), vigilance and fatigue (“In long-distance driving, loss of vigilance may become an important factor in driving errors.”), alcohol (“drinking appears in 25 to 35 percent of many accident reports, and is a factor in up to 50 percent of the fatal accidents”), and narcotics and medical drugs (“may also influence highway safety, although here the relation to accidents is not clear”).

Based on the assumption that drivers were responsible for most accidents, much effort had gone into forms of driver control, namely driver education, licensing, and improvement. The best courses “include driving training as well as classroom instruction in all phases of vehicle operation.” Although the courses were based on the assumption that training would reduce accidents, research had not confirmed the link:

Many attempts have been made to evaluate the effectiveness of driver-training courses. The research has been less than satisfactory because of poor design, inadequate controls, or lack of statistical treatment.

Similarly, licensing had not resulted in expected accident reductions. In the past 20 years, licensing had increasingly been seen as a way of controlling the quality of driving. However, the standard road test and simple tests of vision and knowledge of driving regulations “have shown little relation to highway safety.” Therefore, more intensive screening devices and regular retesting, perhaps based on tests for commercial and military drivers, had been suggested. They posed a problem:

However, such tests usually have had such low validity that in order to eliminate even a small proportion of accident-likely drivers a large number of safe drivers would also have to be rejected.

Because licensing has largely been “unsuccessful and probably will continue to be,” additional insight into the basic nature of the driving task was needed.

The State’s ability to revoke licenses for repeated traffic violations, via a point system, had been demonstrated to be effective in reducing accidents. However, “the analyses upon which this conclusion is based have certain limitations.”

The effectiveness of driver improvement campaigns was also unproven. Advertising campaigns had long been a feature of highway safety campaigns:

It is very difficult to determine whether, or how, most motorists interpret or accept safety promotion information. Utility of such campaigns is especially problematic when most drivers believe themselves to be better-than-average drivers.

Adult driver education classes, particularly for offenders, had been praised “but the evidence is lacking.” Given the element of chance in whether a driver has an accident, the fact that a driver who takes such a class is not involved in subsequent accidents “does not necessarily mean that the training was effective.” Carefully controlled studies were needed. Such studies would also be needed for a new technique of driver improvement: psychotherapy to eliminate “those personality characteristics, such as aggressiveness and impulsiveness, that give indication of causing accidents.” The use of psychotherapy for driver safety, as opposed to other “social areas,” was rare and its effectiveness could not be evaluated.

### *Safety Factors: The Motor Vehicle*

The report also discussed the vehicle as a factor in accidents:

[The] vehicle is commonly thought to be involved as a contributing cause in only a small percentage of accidents, but this is due at least in part to destruction or inaccessibility of the evidence after the accident.

Still, the vehicle was “an extension of the driver’s own capabilities and desires.” Because “the surprise element” was the common denominator in most traffic accidents, “it is imperative that the driver, or a fully proved fail-safe mechanism, have the best possible control of the vehicle.” Therefore, the vehicle should be examined as a factor in highway safety.

Although the automotive industry “feels an intense pride in safety advances that have been made in the vehicle,” the vehicle was not as safe as it could be. The shape and design of bumpers, for example, “often seem to be dictated . . . by styling considerations.” Moreover, the “projectile-like components of the bumpers and bumper guards of some cars are largely nonfunctional and present needless hazards to pedestrians, as do some other embellishments, including projecting hood or fender ornaments.”

The cars of the 1950’s were lower than their predecessors, lowering the vehicle’s center of gravity and providing “improved stability and riding quality on curves.” At the same time, the lower position of the driver produced “complications in seeing and being seen over undulations in the highway.” Truck drivers also had difficulty seeing “the low-silhouette passenger car traveling in the lane to the right of the truck.”

The report praised the “increasing glass areas” on cars, but said, “the sweeping tail fins tend to obscure rear vision in backing.” The lack of defoggers or defrosters on rear windows was “a serious impairment.” Wraparound windshields had a “salutary overall effect,” but wipers were too small to clean the ends of the windshields in bad weather. Outside rear-view mirrors were often “of little use because of their inaccessibility for adjustments by the driver.”

Other elements of motor vehicle design cited in the report were controls and instruments (“appear to have had only limited consideration from the viewpoint of safety”), brakes (“Improvements are needed in the brakes of all types of vehicles”), lighting (“being manipulated to a considerable extent for appearance purposes”), and horsepower (“a powerplant capability far in excess of the needs for speed and acceleration”).

### *Safety Factors: The Highway Element*

The report also evaluated the highway element of the accident picture. The highway “is the one permanent structure of highway safety, working 24 hours a day every day in every year to fulfill its public-service function.” Much of the Nation’s existing highway

network had been built in the 1920's and 1930's "to obtain a connected highway system and to get the farmer 'out of the mud.'" The highways were suited to the low-volume, low-speed traffic of the day. "No one foresaw the great surge of highway transportation that lay ahead and, in any event, available funds and experience were limited." The result was:

Nearly 30 percent of the State rural primary highway systems now serving intercity and interstate traffic are relics of an earlier era with surfaces less than 20 feet wide—a width of at least 4 feet narrower than present standards prescribe. One-third of this mileage carries 1,000 or more vehicles per day. These highways may have been built to standards adequate at that time, but they are far too meager for today's traffic.

Although all highways could not be rebuilt, a "massive attack" on deficiencies was underway as a result of the "expanded Federal-aid highway program" launched in 1956. To focus limited resources, an "effective and lasting" solution would involve improving highway design where the accidents take place.

The National System of Interstate and Defense Highways, which constituted only 1.2 percent of the Nation's road and street mileage, would "alleviate the traffic and accident problem to only a small although important degree." While the design standards issued by AASHO and adopted by the BPR for the Interstate System were being "followed faithfully," the States were also applying the two policies issued by AASHO for other roads: *A Policy on Geometric Design of Rural Highways* (1954) and *A Policy on Arterial Highways in Urban Areas* (1957). These policies "are the nurtured products of long experience and research, including countless observations and analyses of traffic performance and driver behavior, key factors in safe highway design."

The report considered the many elements of highway design, including traffic lanes ("lane width of 12 feet is necessary on primary highway facilities"), shoulders ("at least 10 feet wide to accommodate trucks and still permit a nominal clearance from the traffic lanes"), safety cross-sections ("lessens the likelihood of vehicles overturning"), sight distance ("must be consistent with the speed of traffic"), and bottlenecks and danger points ("corrective treatments can be undertaken on a selective schedule to reach the most urgent needs first").

Skidding was also considered because it "is a far more serious factor in highway accidents than is generally realized." The construction of tires and pavement surfaces to provide the greatest traction and antiskid qualities was essential. The report noted that several State highway departments had effective programs for testing friction characteristics of wet road surfaces, "but in most States little or no consideration is given to this factor."



Full control of access, a standard feature of the Interstate System, was seen as a major safety factor as documented by the BPR on the basis of accident data from 30 States:

Accident and fatality rates on fully controlled access highways have consistently been only one-third to one-half as great as those on highways with no control of access. This is not due wholly to the control of access feature but to grade separation of intersections, provision of separate roadways for opposing directions of traffic, and other design refinements customarily employed in conjunction with access control.

The report recommended:

As construction of the Interstate System proceeds, it will be important to evaluate the effects of various design features and standards on accident rates so that they can be improved and refined, as needed, for portions of the Interstate System yet to be built.

Much remains to be learned, the report said, “in making this comparatively new type of facility serve traffic with the highest degree of efficiency and safety.”

#### *Report Recommendations*

*Traffic Safety*, noting that some of the report’s findings were “contrary to widely held views on traffic accidents,” summarized the eight-point program recommended in the report for an adequate highway safety program:

1. Effective identification of the traffic accident—scientific determination of the what, who, where, when and why of the event.
2. Enlargement of fundamental knowledge—through scientific data obtained by people without other roles in the particular event.
3. Support for highway research—including a central organization to plan, conduct, finance and coordinate research.
4. Leadership and administration—“The responsibility for direction of the highway safety effort is clearly official. Federal, state and local governments have dealt hardly at all with the problem in a coordinated way up to this time, often relying on interested non-official groups to stimulate conferences and other joint action. Lack of an official working focus in the federal government may well have been a contributing factor.”
5. Professional and technical competence—especially in engineering and behavioral sciences.
6. Legislative action—appropriate committees are desirable in state legislatures and city councils to deal with safety legislation.
7. Better coordination and support of closely related activities—“A major factor long neglected is the development of adequate coordination within, between, and outside governments on highway safety activities.” There is also need for government-industry liaison activity, and with other mutual interests.

8. Public relations—to develop public interest and support.

### **Epidemic on the Highways**

Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a native of Tulsa, Oklahoma, was raised in Indiana and New York City. After serving in the U.S. Navy, he earned bachelor, masters, and doctoral degrees at Tufts University and was a Fulbright Scholar at the London School of Economics in the early 1950's. In 1954, he campaigned for Averill Harriman, New York's Democratic candidate for Governor, and served on Governor Harriman's staff until he was defeated for reelection in 1958 by Republican Nelson Rockefeller.

While working for Governor Harriman, Moynihan served on the New York Traffic Safety Policy Coordination Committee and became its Chairman in 1958. His research into highway safety and his work on the committee provided the basis for his first published article. "Epidemic on the Highways" appeared in *The Reporter* issue of April 30, 1959. The article began, as Presidents Truman and Eisenhower had, with a reference to wartime losses, but this time with a switch:

At the height of the Korean War, the United States Air Force suddenly found itself seriously interested in traffic safety down on the ground: it was losing more men from automobile accidents than from enemy action. A further check revealed this was true of the entire armed forces. Moreover, the automobile injuries were generally more serious and required longer hospitalization than the battle casualties.

Because of the continuing highway safety problem, Moynihan said, "the uneasiness in Washington grows." Members of Congress, even "conservative Southern congressmen," and other influential people and organizations, including the American Medical Association, were reaching a single conclusion: "that something more effective than simply urging people to stop killing each other must be done, probably through the intervention of the Federal government." These leaders had been able to "get beyond the slogans to learn some of the facts about what actually causes automobile accidents."

Highway deaths and injuries appeared inevitable because they seemed to "arise so naturally out of the environment." This appearance of inevitability resulted in misconceptions about its causes. Moynihan said the misconceptions are shared even by those who are "intimately involved with the problem." He added, "The National Safety Council is a case in point."

He criticized the Council on many aspects of its work, including its best known publicity peg, the pre-holiday death predictions:

As a matter of fact, the Safety Council often predicts a holiday toll that is below the day-to-day average for the year. The 390 deaths predicted for last New Year's weekend, for example, would have been ten per cent below normal, and the actual toll was 377.

Moynihan also criticized the Council's focus on the number of deaths and the fatality rate. The number of deaths "has tended to decline slightly of late," he said, while the fatality rate "had been declining steadily for thirty years." He explained:

This phenomenon occasionally gives rise to paeans of self-congratulation among the safety professionals. The cover of the March issue of *Traffic Safety*, the Safety Council publication, proudly proclaims, "1,700 LIVES SAVED!" But what brought about the decline? There is certainly no evidence that it was accomplished by any form of safety program, or even that the figures will be as low next year.

He thought the most probable explanation "is that doctors are simply getting better at keeping people alive, so that fewer victims die of trauma whether on the battlefield or the highway." The focus on deaths, Moynihan said, "distracts attention from the fact that automobile accidents maim their victims much more frequently than they kill them."

He also objected to the Council's figures for motor vehicle deaths and injuries, but especially the latter, compared with data compiled by the U.S. Public Health Service. For example, he compared the Council's figure of 1.4 million injuries in 1957, with the Service's figure nearer 5 million. The difference, at least in part, may have resulted from a different definition of injury, but for Moynihan the key point was that while the fatality rate had been declining, the injury rate had been increasing in New York and, he suspected, in other States.

These faults aside, Moynihan stated that the Council's "most serious disservice to traffic safety" was its emphasis on individual responsibility for accidents:

The basic message of the enormous flood of material, publicity, and information that emerges from the Safety Council is that accidents are caused by individual carelessness and can be prevented if drivers will only pay attention.

While granting that an individual could take actions to reduce his or her own risk, Moynihan dismissed the publicity solution to highway safety. He said that "admonishing individuals to drive carefully seems a little bit like trying to stop a typhoid epidemic by urging each family to boil its own drinking water and not eat oysters."

The Council's focus "shifts public attention from factors such as automobile design, which we can reasonably hope to control, to factors such as the temperament and behavior of eighty million drivers, which are not susceptible to any form of consistent, over-all control—certainly not by a bunch of slogans." Moynihan had concluded that because of the wide range of personal characteristics, "it is hopeless to think of doing anything about them for the limited purposes of traffic safety."

He also questioned the focus on enforcement of speed limits. "The basic fallacy behind the crackdown-on-speeders approach is in the unspoken assumption that the legal speed

limits somehow define the safe speeds.” Citing research on the subject, Moynihan said that two-thirds of road deaths occur at speeds under 50 m.p.h., and that 74 percent of accidents resulting in injuries occurred at speeds under 60 m.p.h. He also cited a recent BPR finding that more accidents occur on high-grade roads in open country at 35 m.p.h. than at any other speed.

The other problem with enforcing traffic laws is the assumption that “the law prescribes measures that would have any effect if they were enforced.” There had, he said, “never been any serious effort to find out.” He explained:

Our laws are a patchwork of what seemed like a good idea at the time they were written and could be got through legislatures always wary of offending the Motorist, who has become practically synonymous with the Citizen.

The result was that most traffic safety laws have “as much scientific validity as wrapping a dirty sock around the neck to cure a sore throat.”

Moynihan was encouraged by one recent development, the involvement of the “American doctor in the guise of the epidemiologist”:

For clinical medicine, disease is described as it occurs in individuals; for epidemiology, disease is described as it occurs in an aggregation of individuals, with as much attention being paid to the environment in which it occurs—the highway—and the agent through which it is transmitted—the automobile—as to the “host”—the driver—who gets the disease.

In treating disease, the doctor can alter the factors affecting the agent or the environment. Moynihan illustrated by citing the experience of Jonathan B. Bingham, who had served as secretary to Governor Harriman and the first Chairman of the Traffic Safety Policy Coordination Committee (and as Moynihan’s political mentor) before running successfully for Congress in 1958. In studying the traffic-safety problem, Bingham “quickly found that none of the usual information and assumptions held up under scrutiny.” The doctors he consulted had more questions than answers, but they “by instinct turned away from the problem of driver behavior to that of automobile design”:

To them it seems much more sensible to put off the problem of influencing the behavior of eighty million drivers and concentrate on a matter that in the United States is subject to control by perhaps a dozen persons.

The doctors, Moynihan said, realized that an accident may occur for many reasons (speed, inadequate highways, poor judgment, and so on), but injury occurs primarily because “of faulty interior design of the automobile.” He quoted Dr. C. Hunter Shelden who wrote in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*:

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steering wheel and even the overhead structure are so poorly constructed from the safety standpoint that it is surprising anyone escapes from an automobile accident without serious injury.

Shelden estimated that eliminating “the mechanically hazardous features of interior construction” would prevent 75 percent of the fatalities or 28,500 deaths each year.”

Moynihan described how experience with aviation, particularly research by Cornell University Medical College during World War II, had shown what could be done with automobile interiors. Applying the lessons from aviation would involve “relatively cheap and simple innovations such as padded dashboards, recessed steering wheels, and safety belts, along with a general smoothing off of sharp interior edges and projections.” A Cornell University study estimated that 5,500 lives could be saved by the use of seat belts alone.

Moynihan was pessimistic, based on experience, that the auto industry would adopt these features. The industry, he said, had concluded that safety didn’t sell. The evidence was a safer car produced by the Ford Motor Company in 1956. While Ford advertised the safety features of its car, he said, General Motors continued advertising the power and sex appeal of its models. The public concluded that the “safe” car was designed that way because it would have accidents—and went to buy the powerful, sexy cars produced by Ford’s competitors “that presumably would not have accidents,” as Moynihan said. As soon as Ford shifted its advertisements for the car from “safety,” sales picked up.

Since then, Moynihan said, “no one has challenged the Detroit tradition that ‘safety is a dirty word.’”

Seat belts provided “the clearest illustration” of the problem. Seat belts were available as options, but they were expensive and difficult to install. “Dealers don’t like them and discourage customers from getting them.” As a result, only about 1 percent of American drivers used them. Public-health officials had suggested that the auto industry install the mounts in all cars at a cost of about 50 cents, so motorists could buy the belts and simply hook them on. Manufacturers refused, he said, “mainly on the ground that they would add to the cost of the automobile!”

Because research demonstrated that some cars were involved in more accidents than other comparable cars, one possibility was to advertise the difference. Moynihan quoted Dr. Shelden’s comment that if the industry would not meet its responsibilities, “the entire matter should be removed from its jurisdiction and be solved by methods employed in any other urgent public-health problem.”

The National Safety Council was the most obvious private organization for compiling and publicizing safety comparisons of vehicles. Therefore, the New York Traffic Safety

Policy Coordination Committee had asked the Council in 1958 to include a rating of automobile safety features in the Annual Inventory of Traffic Safety Activities:

The reaction of the Safety Council top brass to this proposal was as prompt as it was horrified. Gad, Sir! replied the Major General (Ret.) who was in charge at the time, such a move would be against policy. The New York Committee replied that it was well aware of this fact and was in fact suggesting that policy be changed. The correspondence ceased abruptly.

One inescapable conclusion emerged:

It would appear that the only organization big enough to take on the automobile industry is the Federal government itself.

Moynihan was encouraged, therefore, by the Roberts Subcommittee. Initially, Moynihan said, Roberts thought the “bare facts” were so obvious that “the debate would be all over once they were made public.” He soon realized that the design of the automobile was the key. The needed changes were known, but as one doctor testified during the first day of hearings, “there the whole program grinds to a discouraging halt.”

In discussing the Roberts bill requiring the Secretary of Commerce to establish safety standards for automobiles, Moynihan explained that the Chairman “feels that there is no longer any point in discussing the possibility of the industry’s regulating itself. The Federal government will have to do the job.” To Roberts, the analogy was with the Civil Aeronautics Administration, which had been regulating aviation for 45 years. “If,” Moynihan said, “the Federal government were to do no more than duplicate its procedures for aviation safety, great progress could be made practically overnight.”

In the short run, he was not optimistic about the fate of Roberts’ bill. “Unfortunately, there is no organization that will speak up for Roberts and lobby for his bill.” The long run was another matter. Moynihan concluded his article with these words:

But regardless of the fate of this year’s legislation, in the long run we can certainly expect some interesting results from the fact that the public-health profession is now turning its attention toward the problem of traffic safety. If any automobile magnate wonders what that can mean, he would do well to run over to Chicago to watch government officials in white coats giving their safety ratings to the sides of beef as they roll off the packing-house production lines.

### **The National System of Interstate and Defense Highways**

From the start, the Interstate System was seen as having a potentially major impact on highway safety. In *Toll Roads and Free Roads*, the 1939 report to Congress in which the

BPR provided the first formal proposal for the Interstate System, the safety factor was cited as one of the benefits:

By providing ample capacity and every safety device known to modern highway engineering, the construction of these roads would effect a greater reduction in the highway accident rate than could be made by an equivalent sum spent for highways in any other way.

This idea remained a theme throughout consideration of the concept and was cited by President Eisenhower in support of the Interstate System.

In the aftermath of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, concerns about the impacts of Interstate highway construction raised parallel concerns from the highway safety community about delays in the program. The control of access feature of the planned Interstate System, one of the main safety features, was a subject of considerable concern because it differed from the full access common on most of the U.S. numbered highways that constituted the existing interstate highway network.

For example, the September 1957 issue of *Traffic Safety* published an article by James D. Saul, a member of the editorial staff, called “Superhighways or Superheadaches?” The subtitle was:

With Planned Access—Beauty, Speed, Safety  
Without Planned Access—Squalor, Delay, Tragedy

The article began:

The gigantic federal-state highway building program is ready to roll. Surveyors are sighting through their transits, contracts are being drawn, bulldozers and draglines are even now gouging out the earth in many localities.

Saul stated that because of the Byrd Amendment, the program had been stretched out beyond the original 13 years to 15 or 16 years (named after Senator Harry Flood Byrd (D-Va.), Chairman of the Finance Committee, the Byrd Amendment required that apportioned funding must be reduced if the Highway Trust Fund was in danger of operating at a deficit). But Saul was more concerned about the requirement for public hearings and their “potential to hamper and delay the program.” He considered hearings “all democratic and proper,” but he had a major concern about who would show up:

But if history repeats itself, as it usually does, it will be the “agin’s” who turn out and give loud cry to protests that they will be hurt by the new location, or by the planned access provisions of the law . . . . Officials can expect attempts . . . to influence the location of the route, to violate the principle of access control, or to sidetrack funds to secondary roads.

He understood how a business might want to preserve its “good location” or a town might prefer not to be bypassed. Still, as Saul put it:

The new highways must be built as major carriers of traffic, and planned access preserves the capacity of a road . . . . The distinction must be made clear—no road can serve efficiently as a major artery and as a service road.

He argued that to change old patterns of thinking about highways, officials must fight for public support. They must explain that control of access is essential to the “safety and capacity of the modern express highway.” The importance of control of access “permits no compromise with this principle.” Bypasses usually result in increased property values “because the reduced traffic brings easier shopping.” Further, he said, “Bypasses usually benefit the established, stable business houses, while those injured are likely to be the more insecure types.” Any disadvantages from the loss of tourist trade would soon be reversed “by increased local trade.”

Saul concluded:

The new highway program is under way. We are already paying for it, and will continue to pay for many years into the future. Delays only cost more money. The smart taxpayer can make sure he gets his money’s worth by supporting officials who are determined to buy the most road for the money. That means planned access.

By 1959, the Interstate Highway Program was in trouble. The BPR had completed a new estimate that increased the cost from \$27 billion to \$41 billion (Federal share: \$37 billion). At the same time, Congress had increased authorizations for construction to counter a recession, but had not increased revenue to pay for the added work each year. Under the Byrd Amendment, this meant the amount available for Interstate construction would have to be cut.

On July 22-24, 1959, the House Ways and Means Committee held hearings on the tax issues resulting from the problem. General Stewart, who had escorted President Eisenhower to the National Safety Council dinner in Chicago the previous year, submitted a statement on behalf of the Council. He began by explaining that because the Council was congressionally chartered, he could not discuss the legal, financial, or political aspects of pending legislation. He would address only the safety aspects.

The Council, General Stewart said, was concerned by any delay or stretch-out in the program “because we believe such a delay or stretch-out will result in more traffic accidents than would occur if construction were completed on schedule. He cited the control of access feature as having proven its potential for saving lives. During the recent Memorial Day weekend, motor vehicle deaths set a new record of 310, but 16 turnpikes with full control of access had carried 5 million vehicles “without a single fatality and only three serious injuries.” For all of 1958, the fatality rate had been 7.3 deaths per 100 million miles of travel on rural roads, but only 2.8 on the turnpikes.



With such evidence in hand, the Council's statistical staff had investigated the safety consequences of any delay in the Interstate construction program:

- Controlled-access modern-design highways already in use are reducing traffic deaths 700 a year below what they would be without these highways.
- With each year's extension of the system, scheduled for substantial completion by 1970, there will be *additional* lives saved which, during the period 1960-1970, will accumulate to a total saving of 30,000.
- Delays or stretch-out in planning construction will result in unnecessary loss of life. For example, if no additional highways were built in 1960, thus delaying completion of the entire system for one year, about 5,700 more deaths would occur by the time the system is completed that would have occurred had the system been completed on schedule.

In short, he concluded, "the National Safety Council believes it to be in the best interest of our people that there be no delay or stretch-out in the construction program of our interstate system of highways."

The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1959, which President Eisenhower approved on September 21, provided only a temporary solution. It increased the gas tax by 1 cent (to 4 cents) on a temporary basis through June 30, 1961, anticipating that the issue would be addressed permanently after a new President took office in January 1961. Construction funding would have to be stretched out.

### **Advancing the Action Program**

In 1958, the Nation had suffered 36,981 motor vehicle deaths, a decline from 1957 (38,702). But fatalities were up 5 percent in the first 7 months of 1959 (20,430 compared with 19,490 during the comparable period in 1958). The increase was partly a result of increased travel, up 5 percent in 1959, following recovery from the recession, and was occurring principally in rural areas.

These results prompted Chairman Hearst of the President's Committee for Traffic Safety to issue a statement in August reaffirming the Action Program. He began by describing the present situation in stark terms:

The Nation is facing a possible all-time record traffic death toll of approximately 40,000 this year. It is estimated that the death rate per 100 million miles of travel, after a steady decline during the post-war years, will rise fractionally to 5.7 compared with the all-time low of 5.6 in 1958. Traffic safety experts have forecast that the 1960 toll may be even higher, possibly reaching 41,000 unless the trend can be reversed promptly.

Although increased travel was partly responsible, Hearst said the Committee considered that “this upward trend from an already deplorable level is unacceptable to the people of this country.” It “must be reversed” by short- and long-term measures.

The Committee members believed that success could be achieved “through vigorous and intelligent application of the tested techniques set forth in its Action Program.” This view “is abundantly supported by the accomplishments of states and cities that have applied these techniques.” He listed the “indispensable factors if any substantial and continuing success” is to be achieved, presented here in paraphrased form:

- Every State and community must enact sound, uniform traffic laws and ordinances;
- Enforce the laws and ordinances fairly, firmly, and impartially;
- Ensure that traffic courts dispense fair and impartial justice;
- Impose reasonable but strict requirements for driver licensing;
- Develop adequate and uniform accident reports and use them to determine needs and corrective actions;
- Stimulate construction of new highways and rehabilitate existing roads using the best engineering techniques for maximum safety;
- Inspect motor vehicles periodically;
- Instruct young people in driving practices and attitudes; and
- Progressive improvement of motor vehicle design and construction to afford safer operation and greater protection for occupants.

After summarizing the Action Program, he said:

All of these elements call for a greater degree of continuing voluntary coordination among all public officials who have responsibilities in the field of traffic, and among private organizations engaged in traffic safety work.

The Committee called on its Advisory Council to ask its members to use their resources and experiences “to seek new techniques and fresh approaches to deal with the problem.” Beyond them, Hearst called for a broader coalition:

The Committee looks to all concerned: officials, governmental bodies, private organizations, citizen groups and the general public to accept their obligations and perform their duties to the end that our people may be spared the human, social and economic losses caused by traffic accidents.

### **Action/Inaction in Washington**

In July 1959, the Roberts Subcommittee held three days of hearings on several highway safety bills and one on exhaust fumes. The Automobile Manufacturers Association

(AMA) termed the bills unnecessary, impractical, or a duplication of effort, and recommended against all of them:

- Regarding the Roberts bill that called for the setting of safety standards for vehicles purchased by the Federal Government, the AMA agreed the Federal Government should set an example, but pointed out that “nationally recognized performance standards already are available.”
- On a bill that required safety devices on all motor vehicles sold, shipped, or used in interstate commerce, the AMA concurred in the objective but said that giving the Secretary of Commerce or any other Federal official responsibility for automobile standards would be “both impractical and unnecessary.”
- The AMA agreed with the objective of a bill that would require a 100-mile road test before sale, but said it would be a step backwards by about 20 years; existing laboratory tests were far superior.
- The air quality bill, nicknamed the Hydrocarbon Bill, would prohibit the operation of any motor vehicle that discharged substances in amounts the Public Health Service considered dangerous; it could not be “undertaken constructively, pending further breakthroughs in research and testing.”

Roberts referred to the AMA’s prepared statement as a “yo-yo” because the AMA agreed with the objectives of each bill, but reversed itself in having anything to do with Federal regulations or specifications. Goodwill, he said, is not enough. After describing the accident toll and the hazards of exhaust fumes, he said:

We cannot do this job with a few slogans, warning us from bumpers or signs posted along streets and highways . . . . We need safer vehicles.

Regarding his bill on standards for Federal vehicles, he said that “promoting the production and operation of safer motor vehicles is a field in which the Federal Government has a definite responsibility.”

When the subject of seat belts and other safety devices came up, the AMA’s representatives, members of its Engineering Advisory Committee, said additional research and experimentation were needed. Under questioning from Roberts, Paul C. Ackerman of Chrysler Corporation acknowledged that seat belts were “probably the most effective means of protecting car occupants” and said Chrysler’s 1960 models would have an indentation in the floor pan indicating where holes could be drilled to attach belts. Charles A. Chayne of GM said his company gave its dealers information about installing seat belts and felt that was sufficient. Andrew A. Kucher said Ford was considering ways of installing seat belts as inexpensively as possible, but had no definite plans. Representing American Motors, Ralph H. Isbrandt indicated that his company’s cars would soon have brackets welded to the floor, possibly by the 1960 models.

Consumer resistance was one of the industry’s concerns. Chrysler dealers claimed that less than 1 percent of customers wanted them. Ackerman said a reel device made seat belts less unsightly, but also discouraged their use.

Representative Charles E. Bennett (D-Fl.), who had introduced the bill on safety features on vehicles used in interstate commerce, discussed the cost of adding safety features such as safety padding, bumpers, and visibility aids. Expecting self-regulation by the automakers was “totally unrealistic.” In the competitive marketplace, they were “at the mercy of the whims and preferences of the buying public,” undercutting the effectiveness of the need for safety devices:

Unfortunately, many or most of the safety features either have no sales appeal or negative sales appeal. What would happen to the public-spirited automobile company which would decide to make less-powerful more manageable cars to save American lives? Purchasers would flock to his rivals and he would lose millions of dollars, as would his chain of dealers.

Or suppose he should decide to incorporate safety features which, though not unattractive, would increase the cost of his product? Again, he would suffer competitively because of price considerations.

Because “inexorable economic laws” doomed self-regulation, he said, Federal regulation of all manufacturers was necessary.

Another AMA, the American Medical Association, testified in favor of the bills. Dr. Horace Campbell emphasized the association’s special interest in padding and other features that would prevent head injuries. The industry had incorporated some safety features in the 1956 models and promised more in 1957, but many were optional on all but the most expensive models. He also considered the padding used in the cars to be inferior with a short, useful life. Dr. Campbell said that “no substantial progress has appeared in either the 1958 or the 1959 models” and he detected that “some regression in car safety has occurred.”

The Roberts bill, H.R. 1341, was the most promising of the bills considered during the hearings. It required the Secretary of Commerce to determine which “reasonable safety devices” should be mandatory for non-military motor vehicles bought by the Federal Government and to develop standards for them. Chairman Roberts hoped the bill, although limited to the government, would “hasten the day when such safety features become standard equipment on all passenger-carrying motor vehicles offered for sale to the public.”

The U.S. Army, Department of Commerce, and General Services Administration (GSA) expressed concerns about H.R. 1341. The GSA pointed out that it purchased about 10,000 vehicles a year and had the authority to order any safety devices deemed necessary for their operation. The Commerce Department agreed that the Roberts bill was unnecessary because GSA could issue specifications for such items as padding, seat belts, or other features. Roberts agreed, but pointed out that since the GSA had never done so, the Congress should force action.

Roberts realized that H.R. 1341 raised fears about Federal domination of the automobile industry. In response, he said:

I don't see any reason why autos should be any more exempt from federal safety standards than airplanes. There is regulation over civil aviation. It is the same principle as making canned goods and drugs come up to the standards of safety. The auto industry ought to put every known practical device on cars.

He added that the government regulated many areas (such as refrigerator doors, railroads, and flammable fabrics) without taking them over and the government has no intention of taking over the automobile industry. Still, the Federal Government "had accepted responsibility for making safety requirements in all fields of interstate commerce." He added, "Whatever the cost, it will not be unreasonable. No one can put a dollar value on human life."

He added, "This is not regulation, not domination, just federal leadership."

The bill passed in the House but would fail in the Senate.

### **The President Maps Traffic Safety Strategy**

On April 13, 1954, the President had established his Committee for Traffic Safety on an informal basis. On January 13, 1960, he provided a formal status to the Committee by signing Executive Order 10858 "to advance the cause of street and highway safety." In addition to specifying the composition of the Committee, the Executive Order described its purpose:

The Committee, on behalf of the President, shall promote State and community application of the Action Program of traffic safety measures established by the President's Highway Safety Conference in 1946, and revised in 1949, and shall further revise and perfect that Action Program in accordance with the findings of further research and experience. It shall also develop effective citizen organization in the States and communities in support of public officials with Action Program responsibilities.

The Committee would also cooperate with Federal, State, and local officials and interested national organizations and "encourage them to study traffic-safety needs, adopt uniform traffic laws and ordinances, and conduct balanced traffic-safety programs."

The Executive Order authorized the Committee to continue present advisory groups, such as the Business Advisory Council, and form others to carry out its activities. Through these links, the Committee "shall aid citizen leaders in developing effective support organizations, assist public officials in determining specific needs and applying remedial measures, plan and guide nationwide traffic safety educational efforts, and advance all areas of highway safety."

The Executive Order also directed the Secretary of Commerce to provide office space, staff, equipment, supplies, and services available to assist the functions of the Committee. The BPR had long supplied this assistance informally.

In addition to signing the Executive Order, President Eisenhower met with his Committee for Traffic Safety in January 1960, his last full year in office. The Committee could report that the fears expressed in mid-1959 that fatalities would exceed 40,000 had not proven true. The total of 36,223 fatalities was higher than in 1958, but the decline in the second half of the year suggested that efforts to moderate the increase had been successful.

After an intensive 2-day reexamination of its Action Program, the Committee told the President that its members were “more convinced than ever that the principles of the Action Program are right.” The Committee noted the heavy 1959 traffic toll, but added that until August, an even worse toll had been predicted:

There can be no question that traffic casualties would have been shockingly higher had it not been for the continuing efforts of public officials and private safety groups to deal with the ever-increasing accident exposure created by more vehicles traveling more miles. In contributing to these efforts, your committee has been guided by your original counsel that it utilize the resources and capacities of existing organizations in achieving the objectives of the Action Program.

The Action Program called for a greater degree of coordination among public officials and private organizations to activate the tested techniques to meet immediate needs and the worrisome development of the immediate future:

With conscientious application of the Action Program by public officials in all states and communities, and with organized public support for this official action, the people of this nation can avoid paying, each year, so high and needless a cost for traffic accidents. By these means, our streets and highways can be safer channels of efficient traffic movement; without them, they will be corridors of death and chaos.

The President approved the Committee’s plan to establish subcommittees of traffic safety authorities to re-examine the Action Program to determine if changes are needed; to develop a campaign to popularize the terminology of the technical phrases of the Action Program so they will be more widely understood; and to convene additional regional seminars for State legislative leaders in the fall.

### **Federal Intervention**

President Truman had warned that the Federal Government would not stand idly by if State and local governments did not take steps within their jurisdiction to improve highway safety. President Eisenhower, who strongly supported State initiative, had

expressed frustration in his 1957 Governors' Conference speech with the States' efforts. Although traffic safety was "happily" still a State and local responsibility, he said the American people were paying the "fearful price for the failure of the states to agree on such safety essentials as standards for licensing drivers and vehicles and basic rules of the road." He warned the Governors:

We simply cannot let this go on. The cost of inaction is prohibitive. Who is going to fill the vacuum? Some one must, and some one will. Are we willing that, once again, it be Washington, D.C.?

As reflected in the Beamer Amendment of 1958 and the 1959 Report to Congress on *The Federal Role in Highway Safety*, Federal officials were reluctant to usurp State authority or the automobile industry's prerogatives.

By 1960, the Federal reluctance was diminishing. In an address in January 1960, Chairman Roberts said:

It is with the greatest reluctance that I come to the conclusion that we need the legislation mentioned, and other measures . . . . The states and local communities could accomplish many of the things that must be done if we are going to reduce the traffic toll . . . . The point is that in view of the record, can we afford to wait for the states to do this? . . . . For more than 30 years we have been trying to get a uniform traffic code adopted by the various states. Some progress has been made, but we have a long way to go.

He summed up:

My point is that if we are going to get the job done, we cannot self-righteously hide behind the cloak of states rights, or reject steps which are going to cost money.

*The Federal Role in Highway Safety* had made a similar point. If State and local officials and the automotive, insurance, and associated industries did not reach agreement on their objectives and obligations, they "face having it decided for them by a public now gradually awakening, how and to what extent they will share in a comprehensive, coordinated highway safety plan."

The States recognized the situation. In the July 1960 issue of *Traffic Safety*, L. S. Harris, Executive Director of the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA), warned:

If states continue to ignore their responsibility to act—when action is so urgently needed—their default will inevitably result in federal intervention.

He referred to the 1958 Beamer Resolution as a good starting point. Each State, he felt, needed to enact a "Little Beamer Resolution" giving its designated officials the authority

to enter into compacts with other States. Such compacts, he pointed out, were common in many areas of government, including allocation of water from the Colorado and Columbia Rivers and forest fire prevention:

So far, not one state has made any move to implement the Beamer Resolution and this lack of activity has not gone unnoticed by the Congress.

Harris stated that at the conclusion of his testimony before the Roberts Subcommittee in 1959, the Chairman had told him:

I remember your organization testified in favor of what was called the Beamer Resolution, H.R. 221, which was passed unanimously in the last session of Congress. I have been a little disturbed by the failure of the States to take any action on that resolution.

With the perception of State inaction, Federal activities were increasing. During the 85<sup>th</sup> Congress, approximately 50 bills or resolutions had been introduced on traffic safety. *The Federal Role in Highway Safety* summarized the bills:

These bills dealt with a wide variety of traffic safety matters ranging from general proposals to “investigate methods of increasing highway safety” to specific proposals that excise tax on automobile windshields, side windows, and rear windows be imposed on a square-foot basis.

Nearly one-fifth of the bills called for Federal standards for safety devices or practices. Five involved driver education, while another five bills and resolutions authorized congressional investigations of traffic safety conditions. The report summarized the four bills and resolutions that had been enacted:

These included (1) permission for the States to form compacts for promoting highway traffic safety, (2) authorization of awards for acts of heroism involving motor vehicles subject to the regulations of the Interstate Commerce Commission, (3) more adequate and realistic penalties for violation of certain motor-carrier regulations administered by the Interstate Commerce Commission, and (4) economic regulation and, as a result, probably more effective safety regulations for certain formerly exempt haulers of agricultural commodities.

The report also commented on the importance of these four new laws:

Although this legislation has constructive intent and may aid the safety of highway travel, it scarcely deals with the major issues in the highway safety field. That this is true after more than 2 years of intensive and highly useful hearings by the special House Subcommittee on Traffic Safety should provide some insight on the breadth and complexity of advancing safety in highway transportation, viewed in its legislative perspective.



## **Joint Federal-State Action Committee**

On June 24, 1957, President Eisenhower had addressed the Governors' Conference in Williamsburg, Virginia, about the complex issue of intergovernmental relations. To examine the issue in greater detail, he had appointed the initial members to the Joint Federal-State Action Committee on July 20, 1957. The goal had been to strengthen the Federal system by bolstering the States' role as essential components. The committee was assigned the task of developing a rationale for determining which level of government should perform particular functions.

The Cochairmen, Governor Robert E. Smylie of Idaho and Treasury Secretary Robert B. Anderson, submitted the committee's final report to the President on February 26, 1960. They explained that their purpose had been superseded by enactment of Public Law 86-380, which created a permanent Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations. At a final meeting on October 26, 1959, the committee agreed to turn its records over to the Advisory Commission and provide a final report to the President.

During its review, the committee had studied a variety of subjects that were highlighted in the final report to the President:

- Migratory Labor
- Atomic Energy
- Natural Disaster Relief
- Block Grants
- Estate Tax Revision
- Flood Insurance
- Legislative Jurisdiction
- Impact of Grants on State and Local Finances
- Workmen's Compensation Laws and Radiation Hazards

To a lesser extent, the committee had considered other topics, including:

- Federal reimbursement for toll roads and freeways
- Medical education
- National Defense Education Act program
- State income taxation of interstate business
- Federal income tax on life insurance companies
- Federal income tax credit for income tax payments to the States.

The toll reimbursement issue was the committee's only foray into the highway field. The Governors' Conference, in a resolution adopted on May 21, 1958, had asked the committee to work with the appropriate committees of Congress to study the issue of what to do about the State-financed turnpikes incorporated into the Interstate System. The turnpikes had been one of the most controversial topics during the 1955-1956 debates on financing Interstate construction. The States, such as New York, that had taken the initiative to build or plan the turnpikes in Interstate corridors believed they had

been shortchanged hundreds of millions of dollars in Federal funds that were going to the States that had not shown foresight in addressing their traffic problems before enactment of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956.

Section 114 of the 1956 Act had postponed the issue by calling for a BPR study of the amount of Interstate mileage built with other funds or as turnpikes—and the potential cost of reimbursement. The topic was covered in the committee’s second progress report in December 1958. Stating, incorrectly, that the legislation had directed the Secretary of Commerce to make recommendations to Congress on the subject, the committee took no action. The one-paragraph response to the Governors’ resolution concluded: “This situation was cited as another instance in which the Joint Committee serves as a channel for more effective consultation between the Federal and State levels of Government.”

(Secretary Weeks had submitted the BPR’s report, *Consideration for Reimbursement for Certain Highways on the Interstate System*, on January 7, 1958. As he noted, the report included “information on the mileage of highways eligible for consideration for such reimbursement, their cost, and depreciation.” Section 114 had not requested the Administration’s views on whether Congress should take action on the issue; the report did not contain views on the matter.)

On May 13, 1960, the President transmitted the committee’s report to Congress. He pointed out that he had often “warned against the dangers of over-centralizing power and authority in the National Government.” One way of avoiding these dangers, the President said, was to strengthen State and local governments. He had, therefore, “sought continually to examine and to improve the balance in our system of divided governmental responsibilities.”

After discussing the committee’s findings and recommendations, the President concluded:

Therefore, in order to strengthen our Federal system and to provide the circumstances for more responsible State governments, I strongly urge the Congress promptly to enact legislation consistent with the recommendations of the Joint Federal-State Action Committee.

### **National Driver Register**

In the 86<sup>th</sup> Congress, Chairman Roberts held hearings on March 21, 1960, on H.R. 5436, introduced by Representative John J. Rhodes (R-Az.). As amended, H.R. 5436 required the Department of Commerce to create a register of people whose motor vehicle operator’s license had been revoked for driving while intoxicated or who had been convicted of a violation of a highway traffic code involving loss of life. *The Federal Role in Highway Safety* had suggested such a registry that would be available to all States on a voluntary basis.

In addition to Congressman Rhodes, witnesses included General Stewart, speaking for the National Safety Council, and Leland Harris on behalf of AAMVA. General Stewart told the Subcommittee that the Council believed a registry was needed, but hoped it could be done without creation of a new Federal agency. He recognized that progress among the States on a cooperative basis had been “disappointing.”

Harris was sympathetic with the goals of the bill but doubted the legislation would accomplish the purpose. AAMVA favored a one-driver-license concept it had been promoting for several years. Under the concept, a driver could have only one driver license and it would be issued by his current State of residence. The concept had been adopted, Harris said, “in those States that have legal authority, budgets, and personnel to implement it.” He added:

The elements which make it extremely difficult for some States to participate in this plan are the same as those which would prohibit them from participating effectively in the Federal register plan: lack of authority, funds, personnel, and facilities.

Congressman Rhodes made his view clear: “If the states are not going to do it, the federal government must take the lead.”

Under Secretary of Commerce Philip A. Ray submitted the Department’s views on March 21, 1960. Although the Department supported the concept of a national driver register, Ray identified several problems that would hamper implementation. For example, he cited the “variety of recordkeeping systems in the States.” They were not all compatible “and a significant number of them are not set up to be usable at the outset in any kind of machine tabulation.” The details, such as whether the register would include only the revoked licenses or would have to include all 82 million licenses, remained to be worked out.

Although Ray estimated the cost in the range of \$275,000 to \$350,000, it could be higher if the nature of State source data required the processing of a much higher number of data cards. He recommended that the bill be amended to allow the Department to charge fees to the States for the services provided by the center.

The Department’s conclusion was:

This vexing question of records administration will have to be solved before this Department, in all candor and conscience, can recommend the commitment of Federal funds. In view of the uncertainty about the significant management element, it would be well to defer consideration of any authority to install a driver’s license clearance center.

These reservations notwithstanding, the House approved the bill.

Senator Warren G. Magnuson (D-Wa.) of Washington, Chairman of the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, introduced S. 3746, which was identical to H.R. 5436 as approved in the House. The Committee held a hearing on the bill on June 25, 1960. All witnesses favored the bill, although the National Safety Council expressed its preference that the States establish the register on a cooperative basis. Commerce Secretary Mueller submitted a letter on June 27 restating the comments of Under Secretary Ray.

Senator Magnuson also asked the ICC, which was responsible for issuing regulations governing the qualifications of drivers of commercial vehicles, to comment on the proposed legislation. On June 27, the ICC expressed several concerns about the bill, such as objecting to its exclusion of “revocations for other reasons of grave importance.” A definition of “driving while intoxicated” was needed, the ICC said, because the wording might exclude revocations for “driving while under the influence,” as the offense was defined in some States. The ICC also recommended amending the bill to allow any Federal Agency with highway safety responsibilities to receive the information.

Although a national driver register “would be of major importance to this Commission,” the ICC recommended “that action on the bill be deferred pending the development of more complete information concerning standards, procedures, and methods of classification of offenses by the various State agencies.”

Despite the concerns raised about the bill, it passed and was approved by President Eisenhower on July 14, 1960, as Public Law 86-660. It contained only three sections. The first directed the Secretary of Commerce to establish and maintain a register of each individual whose license had been revoked for driving while intoxicated or conviction of a violation of a highway safety code involving loss of life. The second section directed the Secretary to provide information to any State or political subdivision on any individual in the register. The third section defined “State” to include the States, Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia, Guam, the Virgin Islands, and the Panama Canal Zone.

Secretary Mueller designated the BPR, under Federal Highway Administrator Bertram Tallamy, to establish and maintain the Driver Register. However, Mueller emphasized that the Federal Government was not entering the driver licensing or traffic law enforcement fields. Under the terms of the new law, the register would be operated as a voluntary State-Federal enterprise.

*Traffic Safety* speculated that “a great deal of exploratory work” and about a year would be needed before this innovative program could get underway:

One problem faced is that motor-vehicle driver licensing is handled in a variety of ways by the states. In 22 states the motor-vehicle administration agency is an independent department; in others the functions are integrated with the operations of the revenue, safety, or some other department, or dispersed among several different departments. The nature of the driver license application information

and handling also varies among the states. In some states, the traffic courts originate license revocations.

Although the BPR intended to put a minimum burden on the States, uniformity of reporting would be essential. The BPR said it would consult with AAMVA, the American Bar Association, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the individual States, and other organizations as necessary to establish the register.

In addition, the BPR investigated the types of high-speed electronic data-processing equipment that would be needed to handle the million licenses revoked each year. The BPR concluded that the register could be handled with its own electronic data processing equipment by using it on a night shift.

As predicted, the registry took about a year to establish. Secretary of Commerce Luther Hodges inaugurated the National Driver Register Service in the BPR's computer room at 3 p.m. on June 30, 1961. At the time, 43 States and 4 territories had agreed to participate and had sent information on 12,000 drivers. The BPR expected to receive records on 1,000 names daily and an average of 20,000 search requests a day.

By September 1963, the National Drive Register had processed 2 million requests from 46 States—the second million in just the past 6 months. (Delaware, Florida, Georgia, and Massachusetts had not participated in the register). To that point, 22,000 searches had resulted in positive matches, thus enabling the States to deny licenses.

## **The Platforms**

The Republican Party nominated Vice President Nixon as its candidate for President in the 1960 election. The party's platform favored "continued improvement of our vital transportation network, carrying forward the vast Eisenhower-Nixon national highway program and promoting safe, efficient, competitive and integrated transportation by air, road, rail, and water under equitable, impartial, and minimal regulation directed to those ends." The platform also promised vigorous support for "a stepped-up program to assist in urban planning, designed to assure far-sighted and wise use of land and to coordinate mass transportation and other vital facilities in our metropolitan areas."

The Democratic Party chose Senator John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts as its candidate. Regarding transportation, the party platform said:

Over the past seven years, we have watched the steady weakening of the nation's transportation system. Railroads are in distress. Highways are congested. Airports and airways lag far behind the needs of the jet age.

The Democrats proposed to develop a national transportation policy, support the Federal-Aid Highway Acts of 1956 and 1958, expanded airport grants and river harbor improvements, and assist railroads in meeting their capital needs, particularly for urban transportation. The platform also promised "a ten-year action program to restore our

cities and provide for balanced suburban development.” The program would include “comprehensive metropolitan transportation programs, including bus and rail mass transit, commuter railroads, as well as highway programs and construction of civil airports.” In view of the difficulties local governments were experiencing with mass transportation, the platform promised to expand Federal programs of aid to help urban communities move commuters to and from their jobs.

The Republicans and Democrats also addressed the growing problem of air pollution. The Republicans pledged “Federal authority to identify, after appropriate hearings, air pollution problems and to recommend proposed solutions.” The Democrats planned to “step up research on pollution control, giving special attention to: the rapidly growing problem of air pollution from industrial plants, automobile exhausts, and other sources.” In addition, the Democratic platform proposed a 10-year action program of Federal-aid to help cities combat air pollution because “the states and local communities can not go it alone.”

### **The Interdepartmental Highway Safety Board**

The Department of Commerce’s 1959 report, *The Federal Role in Highway Safety*, stated that a “pressing need exists for greater national stimulation of official highway safety efforts.” The report explained:

The establishment of an effective national focus for leadership, guidance, and a degree of coordination among the many phases of the official highway safety effort is justified by the large accumulating toll of life and property lost in street and highway accidents.

The national interest would be served by creating “a mechanism to provide leadership, guidance, and coordination of existing and future official highway-safety activities.” Such a mechanism would “give maximum impetus to this facet of the public welfare and provide the voluntary President’s Committee a more substantial and cohesive program to support, with consequent advantage to the total movement.”

To meet this need, the report suggested creation of an Interdepartmental Highway Safety Board, chaired by the Secretary of Commerce “who has major responsibility in the fields of engineering and transportation.” The Board would “coordinate all official Federal traffic-safety programs and all research activities of the Federal Government in the field of traffic safety.” It should seek the advice of State and local officials, who would be encouraged to establish committees to work closely with the Board.

President Eisenhower’s last act on behalf of highway safety came on December 2, 1960, when he signed Executive Order 10898 on Establishing the Interdepartmental Highway Safety Board. The Board was to provide “leadership and guidance of existing and future official activities that affect the safety of travel on public streets and highways and to establish a coordinated traffic safety program for Federal agencies.” The Secretary of Commerce was designated the Chairman of the Board, which included the Secretaries of

Defense and Health, Education, and Welfare; the Postmaster General, the Chairman of the ICC, and the Administrator of the GSA.

In addition to providing leadership to and coordinating traffic safety aspects of Federal programs, the Board would evaluate continuing needs in traffic safety research to focus on the “most urgently needed research”; consult and cooperate with State and local officials in the development, improvement, and application of traffic safety standards, such as uniform traffic laws, enforcement practices, accident records, driver licensing, motor vehicle equipment and inspection, traffic engineering, and safety education; conduct continuing studies of national traffic safety needs related to Federal legislative and administrative needs; submit national progress reports to the President on traffic safety; and perform such other functions as the President may direct.

The Executive Order directed the agencies represented on the Board to assist the Board, as necessary. Employees were to be detailed to assist the Board, including one who would serve as Executive Officer “to perform such functions, consistent with the purpose of this order, as the Board may assign to them.”

The Board “shall be advisory” to the member agencies “and this order shall not be construed as subjecting any agency, officer, or function to its control.” The President’s Committee for Traffic Safety “shall serve as consultant and advisor to the Board.”

### **A Changed Social Order**

With the Eisenhower Administration winding down, the President’s Committee for Traffic Safety met with its advisory and technical groups, along with State and municipal representatives. The goal was to review and update the Action Program.

Dr. Waldo E. Stephens gave the keynote address, in which he asked:

Could it be that one of our foremost tasks is to take inventory of our own concepts, ideas and clichés, which have become a bit thumb worn and outmoded?

He suggested the answer to his question by stating that all advocates of safety must realize “the old concepts, patterns of individual conduct, are not adequate to meet the changed social order.”

Summarizing the meeting in the March 1961 issue, *Traffic Safety* listed some of the hundreds of recommendations the experts provided to the Committee for consideration:

1. “non-fix” tickets;
2. compulsory vehicle inspection;
3. a nationwide system of driver education in the schools;
4. uniform “rules of the road” and traffic signs and signals;
5. improved staffing and administration of traffic courts;

6. improved safety design of autos on a priority basis, with particular emphasis on defrosting and wiping equipment, braking systems, vehicle handling, standardized location of instruments and controls, restraining devices and better absorption of impact energy, evaluation of the safety aspects of automatic controls, and measures to forestall driver fatigue;
7. planning of urban transportation facilities in coordination with safe traffic needs;
8. stepped-up public information programs;
9. initiative by civic and business leaders in the establishment or strengthening of state and community citizen support groups; and
10. increased emphasis by business and industry to off-the-job safety programs.

The Committee for Traffic Safety's Final Summary Report to President Eisenhower stated that "the Nation is making positive gains in the endless fight against motor vehicle accidents." The President's interest had been "of inestimable value to the entire traffic safety movement." Further, the Committee assured him that the "concerted action by some forty national organizations that have worked with the committee has brought about the most effectively-coordinated accident prevention activity in the history of the traffic safety movement."

The forces fighting for highway safety had reason to hope they were beginning to win the battle. Adjusted fatality statistics identified 33,190 deaths (fatality rate: 6.65) on the Nation's highways in 1953, President Eisenhower's first year in office. The total peaked in 1956 at 37,965 (6.05), the year the President signed the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 on June 29. By 1960, President's Eisenhower's last full year in office, the adjusted total was 36,399 (5.06).



## EPILOGUE

### THE CHANGING FEDERAL ROLE

#### **A New President**

A new President, former Senator John F. Kennedy became President of the United States on January 20, 1961. He continued the President's Committee for Traffic Safety and asked Hearst to continue as chairman, thanking him for his effort "to help solve one of the most pressing problems facing the nation today—the high percent of traffic fatalities." The decline in fatalities continued in 1961 (38,091).

On February 21, 1961, the new President sent a message to Congress on "Our Federal Pay-As-You-Go Highway Program." The message addressed the funding problems that had plagued the Interstate Construction Program in the last years of the Eisenhower Administration. Congress had addressed the problem by temporarily increasing the gas tax to 4 cents through June 30, 1961, leaving a permanent solution until the new President took office.

President Kennedy's message began:

Our Federal pay-as-you-go highway program is in peril. It is a peril that justifies a special message because of the vital contribution this program makes to our security, our safety, and our economic growth. Timely completion of the full program authorized in 1956 is essential to a national defense that will always depend, regardless of new weapon developments, on quick motor transportation of men and material from one site to another.

American lives are also dependent on this program in a more direct sense. Better, more modern highways—with less congestion, fewer dangerous curves and intersections, more careful grades and all the rest—mean greater highway safety. It has been estimated that more fatalities will be suffered in traffic accidents between now and 1975, when the new system is fully operative, than were suffered by American troops in every conflict from the Civil War through Korea. Last year witnessed 38,000 traffic fatalities and 1.4 million personal injuries. But on our new expressways the ratio of accidents and deaths per mile driven is only a fraction of what it is on ordinary roads. The Interstate System when completed, it is estimated, will save at least 4,000 lives a year.

On June 29, 1961, the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Interstate Construction Program, President Kennedy signed the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1961. It revised the schedule of highway user excise taxes, including continuation of the 4-cent per gallon gas tax through October 1, 1972. The 1961 Act also adjusted authorizations through 1971 to match the latest estimate of the cost of completing the Interstate System (\$41 billion, with a Federal share of \$37 billion). Based on the 1961 estimate and projections of Highway Trust Fund revenue, the legislation appeared to put the Interstate System on a sound fiscal path.

On January 12, 1962, President Kennedy approved Executive Order 10986 amending President Eisenhower's Executive Order 10986 on Establishing the Interdepartmental Highway Safety Board. The only change was in the membership, which now included the Department of Labor.

The Board held its organizational meeting on June 28, 1962. Commerce Secretary Hodges, the former Governor of North Carolina, was Chairman. Each member provided a report on his Department's safety activities. The group identified principal needs, such as a more precise definition of Federal resources and improved collaboration in meeting objectives and programs. C. W. Prisk, the Deputy Director of the BPR's Office of Highway Safety, was designated Executive Officer of the Board.

At Secretary Hodges' suggestion, the Board agreed to establish a Working Committee on selected staff from the seven Board agencies. The Executive Officer organized the Working Committee. Its first assignment was to evaluate the agency resources with the view of preparing a report on the status of Federal highway safety programs and recommendations for legislative or administrative action, where appropriate.

The fatality toll reached a record of 41,000 in 1962. Motor vehicle travel was at a record high level, as were the number of vehicles and drivers, but the fatality rate had increased to 5.3 from 5.2. *Traffic Safety* said the "death explosion on our highways . . . shattered hopes of holding the toll below the 40,000 level." National Safety Council statistician Miller explained, "The reversal in the death rate in 1962 stands as evidence that the increase in travel, and in the problems of safety which accompany such an increase, are outrunning the street and highway facilities and control programs."

Governor Pyle said of the record fatalities:

We have witnessed the most disastrous toll of traffic fatalities this nation has ever known. Words are simply incapable of expressing this tragic and wasteful loss.

In past years, a small rise in the number of deaths was usually outweighed by a reduction in the rate of deaths per miles of travel. But last year, the mileage rate increased as well.

This gives every indication that this nation is at a critical turning point in traffic safety.

Highway fatalities continued to increase. For 1963, the total was 43,564 (fatality rate: 5.4). In 1964, the total increased to 47,700 (5.6).

### **The Roberts Bill**

President Johnson approved Public Law 88-515 on August 30, 1964, "to require passenger-carrying motor vehicles purchased for use by the Federal Government to meet

certain passenger safety standards.” Chairman Roberts’ bill had finally become law. It stated:

That no motor vehicle manufactured on or after the effective date of this section shall be acquired by purchase by the Federal Government for use by the Federal Government unless such motor vehicle is equipped with such reasonable passenger safety devices as the Administrator of General Services shall require which conform with standards prescribed by him in accordance with section 2.

Section 2 stated that the General Services Administrator shall develop commercial standards “for such passenger safety devices as he may require” and that the first standards shall be prescribed “not later than one year from the date of enactment of this Act.”

As the GSA had pointed out during consideration of the Roberts Bill, the agency had authority under Section 206(a) of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949 to prescribe Federal standard purchase specifications. In practice, the GSA had limited itself to safety and other accessories the manufacturers provided as standard or optional equipment. On June 30, 1965, under the 1949 and 1964 Acts, the GSA published its first set of standards in the *Federal Register* for purchase of 1967 model sedans, carryalls, station wagons, buses, and light trucks up to 10,000 pounds. The standards provided for the following devices:

1. Anchorage for seat belt assemblies.
2. Padded dash and visors.
3. Recessed dash instruments and control devices.
4. Impact-absorbing steering wheel and column displacement.
5. Safety door latches and hinges.
6. Anchorage of seats.
7. Four-way flasher.
8. Safety glass.
9. Dual operation of braking system.
10. Standard bumper heights.
11. Standard gear quadrant, P-R-N-D-L, automatic transmission.
12. Sweep design of windshield wipers-washers.
13. Glare reduction surfaces.
14. Exhaust emission control system.
15. Tire and safety rim.
16. Backup lights.
17. Outside rear view mirror.

On November 3, 1964, the United States reelected President Johnson by a landslide margin over Senator Barry Goldwater (R-Az.). The President’s political “coattails” also elected enough Democrats to create the biggest Democratic majority in the U.S. House of Representatives since 1936. However, Senator Goldwater carried five States, all in the Deep South where his vote against the Civil Rights Bill was popular. In Alabama, his

coattails swept five incumbent Democrats out of office, including Chairman Kenneth Roberts.

Roberts' service in the House, which began on January 3, 1951, ended on January 3, 1965. After leaving office, he resumed the practice of law until his retirement in 1979, but he retained his longstanding interest in highway safety. He served as counsel to the Vehicle Equipment Safety Commission (1965-1972) and as a member of the National Highway Safety Advisory Committee (1966-1970).

The former Congressman died on May 9, 1989, and is buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

### **The Baldwin Act**

In 1963, fatalities on the Nation's highways totaled 43,600, compared with 40,804 in 1962. In a letter on March 23, 1964, President Johnson wrote to Secretary Hodges. Citing the death of 43,400 American in 1963, the President said, "As a Nation, we cannot continue to tolerate this drain on our resources and, as human beings, we cannot continue to tolerate this terrible pain, suffering and loss of life." He called on the Secretary to launch an accelerated attack on highway accidents through the Federal-aid highway program:

Because of the responsibilities of your Department's Bureau of Public Roads in this area, I am designating you to undertake immediately an accelerated attack on traffic accidents in this country. State and local governments should be encouraged and assisted in developing priority safety programs giving special attention to hazards on highways with high-accident experience.

I understand such a safety priority program can be undertaken within the present Federal-Aid program and the resources of the Highway Trust Fund without cost to the general taxpayer.

In a society such as ours where human life and health is valued so highly, there is a special obligation to use our scientific abilities to bring this problem of highway traffic safety under control.

Within 2 weeks, the Commerce Department announced plans for encouraging the States to use a substantial portion of their available Federal-aid funds (\$975 million apportioned for the Federal-aid primary and secondary systems and urban extensions) to eliminate high-hazard locations on the highways. Because the Federal-aid highway program is based on State selection of projects, State cooperation would be essential.

To encourage the States to adopt safety priorities, Federal Highway Administrator Rex Whitton issued an Instructional Memorandum (the standard BPR guidance document) changing review procedures to make it easier for the State highway agencies to receive BPR concurrence in safety projects. The goal was to move safety projects to construction

in advance of other projects scheduled “on the basis of general route improvement.” He asked the States to select projects “on the basis of need as indicated by accident frequency markedly above the average.” Using funds for safety projects would divert resources from other needs, but he believed the safety program would “provide sizeable and immediate benefits to the public through the reduction of accidents.”

Whitton referred to safety as “our first priority.” In urging the States to cooperate with the President’s spot improvement program, Whitton said “faced with the alternative of another traffic toll in 1964 or 1965 like that in 1963, I believe we must rivet our attention on safety as a primary objective in our over-all highway program.” The Office of Highway Safety would help States develop criteria for identifying high-accident locations—those with accident frequency markedly above the average—and collect before-and-after data. Typical spot safety projects would include:

- Widening of narrow traffic lanes.
- Construction of stable shoulders of adequate width.
- Flattening of side slopes and/or removal of roadside curbs and fixed obstructions.
- Reconstruction to increase sight distances on horizontal or vertical curves.
- Widening of narrow bridges or other structures.
- Installation of protective devices at railroad crossings.
- Installation of traffic control devices in conformity with the MUTCD.
- Construction/reconstruction of intersections, including channelization.
- Installation of guardrails, guide posts, and delineators.
- Installation of highway lighting.
- Construction of fencing.
- Construction of service roads, entrances and exits, and curbs.

Recognizing that this new step might create some apprehensions regarding the role of the Federal Government, Whitton said:

It is a normal development when we realize that the fundamental problem of highway accidents cannot be resolved within the boundaries of any city or county, or entirely within any state. The problem simply does not respect any political or geographical boundary lines.

During the first year of the program, 33 States programmed 182 safety improvement projects on highways included in the Federal-aid systems at a cost of nearly \$42 million. At the standard Federal-State matching ratio of 50-50 for projects off the Interstate System, the Federal share came to \$21 million. Whitton summarized the conclusions from the initial spot safety projects:

- (1) substantial reductions in the nation’s traffic death and injury rates can be realized through highway and traffic engineering;
- (2) the greatest and most rapid dividends in reduced accidents can be realized by eliminating accident-inducing features of high-accident locations;

- (3) the cost per improvement need not be large, but the total number of improvements urgently needed will require large expenditures of public funds.

On September 10, 1964, after receiving a report from the President's Committee for Traffic Safety on State and local adoption of the Action Program, President Johnson issued a statement:

The record-breaking motor vehicle travel accompanying the nation's high level of prosperity has increased the need for stepped-up activity to curb traffic accidents. It is self-evident that we must expand and intensify our efforts to prevent these accidents.

Toward that end, it is indispensable that we initiate greater research into the causes and means of preventing accidents. We need the active participation of the best minds in the colleges and universities in all of our states. We need to enlist researchers in all of the sciences: medicine, law, engineering, psychology, public information—every field that can help us to learn more about human behavior, and to develop new means of increasing the safety of highways and vehicles. I am asking the committee to report back to me as soon as it can as to the current status of traffic safety research in these fields, and what should be done to stimulate broader activity.

This is not to say that our present efforts have been fruitless. With the explosive traffic growth, our plight would be far worse had it not been for diligent safety activities.

Primary responsibility rests in our states, counties and municipalities; and the committee's report makes evident that improved performance, overall, has been attained.

The federal government and the Congress have cooperated, also, in many ways. A notable example is the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways, with its many safety features.

The Committee for Traffic Safety has given leadership in stimulating state and community application of the tested and proved accident prevention measures of the Action Program. Greater understanding of this program has been developed through national and regional conferences of legislators, public officials, and citizen leaders—both men and women. The committee's projects are conducted through its advisory council of national, non-profit organizations of public officials and private interests, and federal agencies.

Nevertheless, our combined efforts clearly fall far short of our requirements. There is urgent need to apply the entire Action Program more vigorously through day-after-day cooperation of private citizens and public officials. There is need

for more technical assistance to these officials from national traffic safety service organizations.

These and many other needs must be met so we may deal more effectively with our critical traffic accident problem. We cannot accept the intolerable drain on our human and economic resources that these accidents are causing.

Congress took another step with adoption of the Baldwin Amendment, part of a one-page bill amending the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, primarily to authorize Interstate funds for Fiscal Year 1967, and call for a Commerce Department report on estimates of future highway needs of the Nation. The President signed the bill on August 28, 1965, as Public Law 89-139. In Section 4, the bill included a provision introduced by Representative John F. Baldwin (R-Ca.) that added Section 135 to Title 23, United States Code. It stated:

After December 31, 1967, each State should have a highway safety program, approved by the Secretary of Commerce, designed to reduce traffic accidents and deaths, injuries, and property damage resulting therefrom, on highways on the Federal-aid system. Such highway safety program should be in accordance with uniform standards approved by the Secretary and should include, but not be limited to, provisions for an effective accident records system, and measures calculated to improve driver performance, vehicle safety, highway design, and maintenance, traffic control, and surveillance of traffic for detection and correction of potentially high accident locations.

The original Baldwin Amendment, as approved by the House, provided that the Secretary of Commerce could not apportion Federal-aid highway funds to a State that did not have a highway safety program that met the requirements of the law. Funds withheld from a State were to be reapportioned to other States. The Conference Committee to resolve differences between the House and Senate versions of the bill deleted the fund provision. In the Conference Report, the Statement of the Managers on the Part of the House explained that the change had been made and added:

It is the expectation of the conferees that the Committee on Public Works will examine from time to time the extent of voluntary compliance by the States with this new section of title 23 with a view of determining whether any further legislative action is necessary.

In a statement released on August 28, President Johnson praised the new law's other provisions, then added:

This legislation also provides the tools for a coordinated national attack on highway accidents. It provides that the Secretary of Commerce shall develop uniform standards for State highway safety programs. The death of over 48,000 persons on our highways last year and the prospect of an even greater total this year give urgency to a national safety effort. The approach provided for by this

legislation is in keeping with the traditional Federal-State relationship through which the Federal aid highway program has operated so successfully. It recognizes the primary responsibility of the States for highway safety and at the same time acknowledges the Federal Government's responsibility to lead and coordinate.

Shortly after enactment of the law, the BPR's Office of Highway Safety began working with State officials to develop the standards. However, the Baldwin Amendment would soon be overtaken by events.

### **Unsafe at Any Speed**

On March 22, 1965, the Subcommittee on Executive Reorganization, Committee on Government Operations, United States Senate, began a long-range series of hearings on the Federal Role in Traffic Safety. The Subcommittee Chairman was Senator Abraham Ribicoff, the former Governor of Connecticut (1955-1961), Chairman of the Governor's Conference Special Committee on Highway Safety, and Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare (1961-1962). He had taken office as a Senator on January 3, 1963 (and would serve until January 3, 1981).

Chairman Ribicoff explained that the goal was to review "from top to bottom" the Federal, State, and local agencies involved in highway safety. He also intended to hear from the automobile industry and safety advocates. Two points stood out, he said. First was "the vast extent of the so-called traffic safety establishment." The establishment "extends from the local police station to community safety councils to State traffic safety commissions and to the White House itself." He had identified 16 agencies of the Federal Government with at least some traffic safety involvement. On this first point, Chairman Ribicoff said:

We will endeavor to establish exactly what the present Federal role in traffic safety is, how much is expended to support it, how it might duplicate and overlap, and how it might be improved.

The second point was that, "despite the efforts of the past—despite massive safety campaigns both public and private—the awful carnage on our roads and streets continues and worsens." Using National Safety Council statistics, he described the grim reality:

As a result of traffic accidents which occurred in 1964, 47,800 people have already died, and before the records are closed the total is expected to exceed 48,000 which is 10 percent more than 1963 fatalities which numbered 43,400. What is even more significant is that the deaths per 100 million miles traveled rose from 5.3 in 1962 to 5.5 in 1963 to 5.7 in 1964. If the current increase in the traffic fatality rate continues, deaths will rise to 100,000 a year by 1975.

Having stated the traffic safety problem, the question becomes, first, what are we doing about it, and second, what can we do about it?



The hearings, taking place from March 22, 1965, to March 22, 1966, covered 1,592 pages of printed testimony.

On March 25, one of the witnesses was Daniel Patrick Moynihan, author of the April 1959 article “Epidemic on the Highways” in *The Reporter*. In 1961, President Kennedy had appointed Moynihan to the post of Assistant Secretary of Labor for Policy Planning and Research. In this position, Moynihan had continued working on highway safety because Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz was an *ex officio* member of the President’s Committee for Traffic Safety and, after January 12, 1962, a member of the Interdepartmental Highway Safety Board.

Representing Secretary Wirtz before the subcommittee, Moynihan summarized his biography, including his years in New York, and his continuing interest in highway safety after Governor Harriman had lost his reelection bid:

Thereafter I maintained my interest in the field, published occasional articles, and involved myself with a group of epidemiologists, engineers, lawyers and political scientists in an effort to learn whether our respective disciplines when combined could not, in Paul Appleby’s phrase, somehow make a mesh of things.

Making “a mesh of things” was one of Moynihan’s several gifts that served him throughout his life. He was a synthesizer who had no fear of reaching conclusions that might be controversial. His 1959 article, while not the first to blame the auto industry for highway deaths and injuries, was typical of a career in which Moynihan was often ahead of the consensus, sometimes at his own peril. Moynihan’s testimony on March 25 largely followed the themes in his article.

Moynihan also had a gift for picking aides. At the Labor Department, he hired a part-time consultant in 1964 for \$50 a day. The consultant, a young lawyer named Ralph Nader, had published an article, “The Safe Car You Can’t Buy,” in *The Nation* in April 1959 that tracked Moynihan’s thinking. Nader’s point was:

It is clear Detroit today is designing automobiles for style, cost, performance and calculated obsolescence, but not -- despite the 5,000,000 reported accidents, nearly 40,000 fatalities, 110,000 permanent disabilities and 1,500,000 injuries yearly -- for safety.

Working odd hours from the middle of 1964 to the spring of 1965, often arriving at his office after midnight, Nader compiled a Labor Department report called *Context, Condition and Recommended Direction of Federal Activity in Highway Safety*. Nader biographer Justin Martin observed, “Meant for background use only, the report failed to make a ripple, let alone a splash.” (*Nader: Crusader Spoiler Icon*, Perseus Publishing, 2002, p. 40).

The young lawyer came to the attention of a publisher who was interested in releasing a book on highway safety. Nader had begun work on a book in the early 1960's, and now finished it in early 1965. The result was *Unsafe at Any Speed: The Designed-in Dangers of the American Automobile* (released by Grossman Publishers on November 30, 1965). The book reflected Nader's view that the culprit in highway safety was not the "nut behind the wheel," but the makers of vehicles that were inherently unsafe. He said:

A great problem of contemporary life is how to control the power of economic interests which ignore the harmful effects of their applied science and technology. The automobile tragedy is one of the most serious of these man-made assaults on the human body . . . . Our society's obligation to protect the "body rights" of its citizens with vigorous resolve and ample resources requires the precise, authoritative articulation and front-rank support which is being devoted to civil rights.

To illustrate the idea, the book's first chapter highlighted safety defects in the 1960-1963 Chevrolet Corvair, GM's popular response to the invasion of Germany's Volkswagen Beetle and other small foreign cars into the American market. As described in Nader's book, the Corvair had a tendency for rear-end breakaway behavior that led to uncontrollability and rollovers. The chapter began by quoting John F. Gordon, GM's President. In a speech to the National Safety Congress on October 17, 1961, Gordon spoke about the "diversionary forces" that were undermining safety progress:

The traffic safety field has in recent years been particularly beset by self-styled experts with radical and ill-conceived proposals . . . . The general thesis of these amateur engineers is that cars could be made virtually foolproof and crashproof, that this is the only practical route to greater safety and that federal regulation of vehicle design is needed. This thesis is, of course, wholly unrealistic. It also is a serious threat to a balanced approach to traffic safety . . . . The suggestion that we abandon hope of teaching drivers to avoid traffic accidents and concentrate on designing cars that will make collisions harmless is a perplexing combination of defeatism and wishful thinking.

That was, however, precisely what Nader had in mind. The tragic story of the Corvair made up only the first chapter in a book that constituted a broad attack on virtually every aspect of the nationwide effort to reduce fatalities and injuries on the road, from its start to the present.

Nader derided the 1924 and 1926 highway safety conferences sponsored by Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover:

Out of these conferences, sponsored and financed by private funds, came a number of recommendations dealing with statistics, education, public relations, traffic control, and a model uniform vehicle code. Underlying all these efforts was the view that highways and vehicles were built about as well as could be expected under existing technology, and that traffic accidents were therefore

traceable to willful, careless, irresponsible, or incompetent drivers . . . . “The three E’s”—Enforcement, Education, and Engineering—became the slogan for a “balanced” traffic safety program. It was not long before the public was given to understand that “Enforcement” and “Education” meant the motorist, while “Engineering” meant the highway.

Nader was particularly critical of the highway safety “establishment” groups that he indicated were financed mainly by the automotive and insurance industries as a cheap alternative to building safer vehicles. He reserved special contempt for the President’s Committee for Traffic Safety and the National Safety Council. The automobile industry, Nader said, had shown “considerable ingenuity” in developing the idea for the President’s Committee. “It was created in 1954 simply by a letter from President Eisenhower to Mr. Harlow Curtice, head of General Motors and chairman of the then Business Advisory Committee on Highway Safety.” The President indicated he wanted to follow up on the enthusiasm generated by the White House Conference on Traffic Safety (“sponsored by private industry,” Nader noted) as well as “the fine work begun by the business group.”

Two weeks later, according to Nader, the organizational meeting took place in room 4426 of the Treasury Building, where Curtice told the Committee’s other members that the group was intended to organize local communities for the safety effort based on the Action Plan and serve in an advisory capacity to the President. They agreed that Admiral Miller, upon approval of his current employer, the American Petroleum Institute, would be the volunteer director; that Light Yost of GM would be the secretary, and that “President” should be included in the Committee’s name.

William Bethea, the Committee’s Executive Director from 1954 to 1961, would be paid by private contributions. Nader quoted Bethea as saying he left the Committee when he realized that “nothing effective could be done.” Bethea said the members were “completely hostile to the federal government . . . . They never want to talk about the vehicle, which is the primary bugaboo.” He did not consider the members to be “safety professionals”; they were “organization and public relations men.”

His successor, William Foulis, was, in Nader’s words “a former radio broadcaster and a genuinely talented practitioner of the art of double-talk.” Foulis’ assistant, Richard Tossell, “is an unpretentious holder of a doctorate in safety education.”

The President’s Committee for Traffic Safety was “quite without parallel in the history of American government.” It had been “created by and then leased back outright to private enterprise” at a cost of about \$50,000 a year. “Foulis and Tossell labor in government office space and give instructions to civil servants under their authority, but on pay day their checks carry the name of a private, tax-exempt organization called the President’s Action Committee for Traffic Safety.” Most of the salary came from the Automotive Safety Foundation (ASF) and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS). “The President’s Committee is composed of eighteen patronage positions filled by fairly prominent individuals, most of whom know nothing whatever about traffic safety.”

Nader reported that in recent years, high officials in the Department of Commerce had tried to dissolve or curb the Committee:

A host of arguments was advanced to support their case: the untenable fiscal and administrative practices resulting from the mixing of private funds and staff with public funds and staff; the inherent inability of the committee to be adequately responsive to the public interest when its direction comes from private groups; the obstruction, duplication, and complications it poses for the Office of Highway Safety [in BPR]; the false impression it gives to the public that the federal government is playing an important role in highway safety when the committee is actually being used to make sure that precisely the opposite is the case; the use of the committee's Presidential prestige to preserve the status quo in safety policy at the state and community level; the superfluous nature of the committee in light of the creation of the Office of Highway Safety, the Division of Accident Prevention, and the Interdepartmental Highway Safety Board in the years since the committee was organized; and the more efficient and more appropriate exercise by the Office of Highway Safety of whatever useful endeavors the committee is supposed to perform as outlined in its executive order.

The assassination of President Kennedy on November 22, 1963, occurred before the Commerce officials had a chance to discuss their concerns with the President. By the time Secretary Luther Hodges submitted a proposed Executive Order to the White House on the subject in January 1964, Hearst had convinced President Johnson to retain the Committee.

The President's Committee for Traffic Safety and the Advisory Council that provided guidance to it had, Nader concluded, an "essentially negative mission to see that the federal government stays out of traffic safety and that the entrenched view of accidents and injuries as being due to driver behavior is not disturbed."

The National Safety Council, he said, "remains the unswerving keeper of the traditional faith." Nader conceded that virtually everyone in America was aware of the Council's promotional material, including its holiday fatality projections. ("Should the prediction be exceeded, it shows how important are the council's warnings against carelessness; if the prediction exceeded the actual toll, then the council concludes that its warnings made people drive more carefully.") Nader explained:

Since its founding . . . the council has saturated the country with slogans, printed material, and broadcasted exhortations for safer driving. It has helped to form state and local safety councils, accrediting seventy-two of them as council affiliates, all devoted to persuading the public to drive carefully.

While he considered this effort “useless,” he did not consider it harmless:

What seems to fill a need in form succeeds very well in excluding alternative methods that could fill it in fact . . . . Stripped to its fundamentals, the council view is that man must be the element adapted to the accident and injury risks of automobile driving, not that the automobile must be designed for maximum possible adaptation to man’s requirements.

The Council, Nader said, conducted no research, and had “an unblemished record of never differing with the automobile industry.”

Nader also compared the Council’s goals with its achievements. The effectiveness of the Action Program promoted by the Council and the President’s Committee for Traffic Safety “has never been determined.” No comparison had ever been published of traffic safety in communities that had and had not adopted the Action Program, although Nader stated that unpublished correlations by Council staff “have shown negative or inconclusive results.” After quoting former Governor Pyle as saying the Action Program represented “the best of fifty years of ideas, experience and research findings in traffic safety,” Nader stated that since the Action Program had been unchanged since 1949, it hardly reflected 50 years of experience.

He considered the reliance on the Council for traffic accident statistics “a rather unusual delegation of a public function to a private organization.” He added, “The council has not failed to abuse the privilege.” It did not attempt to differentiate among the accident experience of different makes and models of automobile. It also was a “staunch adherent” of relying on the fatality rate to measure traffic safety progress. Nader explained his objections to the concept:

There are many questions that can be raised about the consistency of methods in calculating vehicle miles traveled, but the pertinent factor here is that any claim of a reduced death rate per vehicle miles traveled gives an illusion of progress which is definitely misleading. The fatality rate per hundred million vehicle miles traveled had gone down steadily from 11.4 in 1940 to 5.2 in 1962, then began rising again in 1963 and registered 5.7 in 1964. But fatality rates have remained basically unchanged when the total population of the United States is used as a base. For example, traffic deaths per 100,000 population totaled 26.1 in 1940, 23.0 in 1950 and 24.9 in 1964. What this means is that a motorist can expect to drive farther in any given year without being killed, but he is just as likely as in previous years to be killed within that year.

The fatality rate also obscured the “tremendous injury totals and rates.” He explained:

National injury statistics are arrived at only by sample, but evidence in various states indicates a sharp increase in injury rates during the postwar years, reflecting in part a greater density of vehicles in urban areas and more rapid modern medical care that is saving lives.

Nader was critical of other highway safety groups as well. For example, the ASF had been founded in 1937 by four automobile executives, and was supported by contributions from the automobile industry:

Contrary to what its name might imply, the Automotive Safety Foundation has no concern for the automobile *per se*; except that it be driven better, maintained properly, and provided with more highways and off-street parking.

Early on, the ASF promoted Standard Highway Safety Programs for the States based on “two cornerstones” that Nader described as a “balanced program” for accident prevention, and “the necessity for official responsibility by state and local officials backed with organized citizen support groups.” He added:

With refinement and expansion by ASF and other automobile representatives, this program in 1946 was changed to the Action Program for Traffic Safety, which continued to be the blueprint for concerted activity.

Nader stated that the ASF and the National Safety Council had received a draft version of the BPR’s report *The Federal Role in Highway Safety* “which may help explain why by the time the study was published the government’s role in vehicle safety was never defined.”

The traffic safety attitude of the IIHS, founded in 1959, “closely parallels the ASF.” IIHS President Russell Brown had called for an additional \$500 million of State and local funds annually “to support existing programs on a greater scale and to augment the private budgets of the national service organizations.” But, Nader added, “neither he nor his organization’s literature mentions vehicle design”:

The issue which appears to motivate the programs financed by IIHS and which makes it so cooperative with automobile industry interests is the threat of federal incursions into state jurisdiction over traffic safety.

Nader quoted a comment that Brown made in “almost every address”:

In the management of our vast highway transportation system, public policy must be based on the premise that sovereignty rests with state governments, and that federal and local governments only have those rights that are given to them by sovereign states. Therefore, the focal point for all highway traffic control and safety activities is the State.

The IIHS backed up its position by providing grants for State traffic safety programs. Nader explained that the policy of the IIHS was “to encourage formation of these citizen units in all states to ‘influence personal behavior in traffic and create and express public support for official programs.’”

What particularly disturbed Nader, he said, was that the insurance industry had known about unsafe vehicle design for years and had even received compensation from automobile manufacturers for claims on a confidential basis. The industry had not, however, reported this vehicle design data to the public:

[Information] of life-saving import, which connects vehicle features with statistically or clinically significant accident and injury experience is being denied to the public, to the companies' own policy-holders, and to the industry's actuaries who could devise a vehicle-rating policy aimed at loss reduction.

Of course, the automobile industry was a chief target of *Unsafe at Any Speed*. On the 1956 Ford safety car the public would not buy:

Ford terminated its safety campaign in the spring of 1956 after an internal policy struggle won by those who agreed with the General Motors analysis of the probably unsettling consequences of a vehicle safety campaign. The 1956 Ford finished second to Chevrolet in sales, but its failure to be number one had nothing to do with the Ford safety campaign. Even so, it has since been cited to prove that "safety doesn't sell."

A footnote to this paragraph explained:

That was not the only year that Ford failed to exceed Chevrolet in sales. Moreover, the 1956 Ford, in contrast to the Chevrolet and the Plymouth, was barely changed from the previous year. Ford's Robert McNamara released publicly in early 1957 detailed figures on safety option sales and market surveys showing the marked success of the safety features in attracting purchasers. But to the delight of the industry the saying that in 1956 "Ford sold safety and Chevy sold cars" caught hold and became a standard response to critics of the automobiles companies.

Similarly, Nader referred to American Motors' experience with seat belts in the 1949 Nash. The episode had been cited repeatedly by industry representatives as evidence of a lack of public interest in seat belts. Nader said:

Some facts seem continually to be obscured in the industry's interpretation. Nash provided a belt to hold a reclining passenger in place against the shifting and stopping that would ordinarily be experienced in a moving car. Billboards showed a grandmother sleeping peacefully, held snugly by the belt. It was not constructed, offered or advertised as a belt for collision protection. What are now known as seat belts were not offered by American Motors until the mid-fifties. This reclining-seat "seat belt" was not emphasized in Nash's promotion of the reclining seat option; in fact the belt was completely hidden underneath the seat, and many customers did not even know it was there. There was nothing in the owner's manual about the belt. Nash dropped the feature because it considered it a needless expense. As Ralph Isbrandt, vice president of American Motors, told

the Roberts' House subcommittee on Traffic Safety in a 1957 hearing on seat belts, "As we gained experience with the reclining seat, it appeared that this feature actually did not create an increased need for a restraining device."

To illustrate how the industry preferred to highlight any aspect of the driving experience except the vehicle, Nader discussed GM's interest in improved highway design. He quoted Kenneth A. Stonex, a chief research official and spokesman for the company:

My interest in improved highway design will probably contribute more to highway safety than anything else I can do.

Stonex had explored highway safety features by implementing his ideas at the 65-mile private road system at the GM proving grounds in Milford, Michigan. He believed that the key safety features were control of access, one-way traffic, and fewer roadside obstacles. He focused particularly on the latter, removing all fixed objects within 100 feet from the pavement and replacing guardrails with, in Nader's words, "designs made safe for collision." With this design, Stonex said, "It would be pretty hard to commit suicide on proving ground roadsides."

Recognizing that many of these safety features were being incorporated into the Interstate System, Stonex wanted to include them in the Nation's other roads as well:

This is the real transportation problem that remains to be approached. What we must do is to operate the 90% or more of our surface streets just as we do our freeways . . . [converting] the surface highway and street network to freeway and Proving Ground road and roadside conditions.

Nader claimed that GM's focus on highway design rather than vehicle design was based on two factors. First, the initiative on highway design was "extraordinarily cheap." Three or four engineers at the proving ground could do all the work, such as staging crashes for visiting delegations and giving repetitive speeches on highway design at technical meetings. Second, the cost of highway safety improvements was "paid for by the public, not by General Motors."

Nader singled out Liberty Mutual Insurance Company for praise for its 10-year, \$250,000 project with the Cornell Aeronautical Laboratory, including development of Survival Car I (1957) and II (1961). The 1961 version included 24 major design features, such as "capsule seats," a safer steering assembly and fail-safe braking system, a rollover bar, and a smooth hood to reduce the severity of pedestrian injuries. "That an insurance company," Nader said, "had to produce the first prototype safety car itself constituted a stinging rebuke to the automobile makers." The auto industry was hostile to Survival Cars; Nader reported that the experimental Mustang (1963) included eight of the safety features, but all were dropped by the time the car went into production.



The insurance industry's reaction "was one of indifference." After all, Nader pointed out, "the profits of the casualty industry now come much more from investment income than from earned premiums."

He was no easier on the GSA. In Nader's view, the GSA was victimized by industry advisors as it attempted to comply with the Roberts Bill, Public Law 88-515. Although Chairman Roberts' bill had passed in the House in 1959 and 1962 by a large majority, the automobile industry, he said, had blocked passage in the Senate. Nader cited the Automobile Manufacturers Association's testimony that "nationally recognized performance standards already are available" and that the bill would lead to duplication and unnecessary expense. Those standards had been developed, he said, by the AMA's associates in the American Standards Association and the Society of Automotive Engineers. AAMVA had opposed the bill because it "would probably result in serious injury to the economy of this Nation . . . and would create stagnation among automotive engineers and designers."

Chairman Roberts worked out a deal with Chairman Magnuson of the Senate Commerce Committee in 1964 involving support for the Senator's bill on medical care for commercial fishermen, leading to enactment of P.L. 88-515. Nader reported that the GSA began to implement the law "with sincerity and showed a determination to explore available knowledge from a variety of sources." It formed two advisory committees, one with representatives of Federal agencies, the other composed of automobile industry representatives. Industry officials consistently argued for limiting the standards to existing "proven" optional safety features.

The preliminary 17 standards were published in January 1965, with Nader noting the expectation within GSA that the final standards would be "substantially toughened." Instead, the final standards published on June 30, 1965, "were watered down" and "even more accommodating to the industry" than the preliminary standards. Nader explained:

[GSA] permitted company engineers to see and comment on the final draft of the standards, right up to the time when the draft had to be sent to the printers. The final standards in general represented quite a triumph for the automobile makers. They obtained a government endorsement of existing optional safety devices and approval, by and large, of existing levels of safety. GSA was directed toward the "gadget" approach to safety and away from the much more fundamental structural approach.

In Nader's view, the GSA's "dismal performance . . . does not provide much ground for optimism over standards the agency is committed to develop in succeeding years."

Nader, nevertheless, was supportive of Chairman Roberts' work. He "performed some important services for the cause of traffic safety," not the least of which was providing "the first public forum for presentations on the vehicle safety issue by industry representatives and by physicians, engineers, and other specialists in crash injury research."

Roberts, Nader said, had been most disturbed by the attitude of Federal officials, for whom “the automobile was a taboo subject.” In “a rare flush of anger,” Roberts had expressed his frustration during testimony by the BPR’s Prisk on H.R. 2446, a 1961 bill calling on the Department of Commerce to develop standards for hydraulic brake fluid. When the Commerce Department expressed the view that the States could best exercise regulatory authority in this area, Roberts told Prisk:

I am getting tired of introducing bills and holding hearings on safety matters. This is certainly not a far-reaching bill. But it is a bill that can save a lot of lives. And when the Department continually comes up here and recommends against a very small step in the direction of the safety of our people on the highways, roads, and streets of this country, it seems to me that certainly we ought to investigate and find out what is wrong with the Department of Commerce . . . . They constantly opposed every effort the Congress made for safety in that field. I am not going to be satisfied until we find out what is happening at the Department level.

### **On The Hill**

With fatalities estimated to exceed 49,000 in 1965, President Johnson’s State-of-the-Union Address indicated that he intended to propose national highway safety legislation, an idea that was widely supported. An editorial in *The New York Times* on January 28, 1966, supported more research into “this baffling, stubborn and deadly killer.” It added that “while research is intensified, safer cars and highways, better-trained drivers and relentless way on violators of the law can help reduce the death toll.” *The Washington Post* adopted a similar theme in an editorial on February 1, 1966, that endorsed Federal legislation to establish minimum standards for automotive design as well as uniformity in driver licensing. The editorial said, “We think the time has come for Congress to take a hand in this campaign against slaughter on the highways.”

On January 24, 1966, Secretary Connor addressed the Economic Club of Detroit. Connor, a former GM director before becoming Secretary, warned the automobile industry executives in attendance:

To the extent that the automobile industry exercises responsible leadership in matters of public concern, there will be correspondingly less pressure for government action, particularly for Federal Government action. The judgment in matters such as these is ultimately based on public confidence, confidence among the general public that the industry is acting in a responsible manner.

He praised the industry for its \$10 million commitment to a recently announced Highway Safety Research Institute at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. It was, he said,

“one more dramatic example of a responsible industry helping to meet the challenge of highway safety.” He encouraged the industry to “make your story known.” He said:

In this less than perfect world, it is not enough merely to do the right thing.  
People must know that you are doing the right thing.

However, the “great stir of interest in action on highway safety [would] accelerate during the coming session.”

On February 10, 1966, Senator Ribicoff summoned Nader to testify as part of the continuing hearings on the Federal Role in Traffic Safety. The Chairman called *Unsafe at Any Speed* a “provocative book” that “has some very serious things to say about the design and manufacture of motor vehicles now operating on the Nation’s highways.” He added that the book “raises serious questions about current public policy in regard to traffic safety.”

Nader lived up to this advance billing, providing a scathing description of the safety establishment and the automobile industry, as in the following comments:

*The motor vehicle:* The motor vehicle performs as the greatest environmental hazard in this country . . . . And year after year, our scientific, technological, and organizational know-how and potential, to literally “invent the future” of motor vehicle safety expand exponentially and thereby expose the shocking, shameful gap between what can be done and what is being done.

*The auto industry:* There is an old Roman adage which says: “Whatever touches all should be decided by all.” The safety the motorist gets when he buys his car should not be determined solely by manufacturers—especially a tightly knit few—whose interests are necessarily one of profit-parochialism. A democratic policy should not permit an industry to unilaterally decide how many years it wishes to hold back the installation of superior braking systems, safer tires, fuel tanks that do not rupture and incinerate passengers in otherwise survivable accidents—collapsible steering columns, safer instrument panels, steering assemblies, seat structures and frame strengths, or to engage in a stylistic orgy of vehicle-induced glare, chrome eyebrow bumpers and pedestrian impalers—to take only a few examples of many.

*Annual model changes:* The car buyer pays over \$700, according to a study by MIT, Harvard, and University of Chicago economists, when he buys a new car for the cost of the annual model change, which is mostly stylistic in content. Consider how much safer today’s automobile would be if over the past few decades the car buyer received annually a substantial safety advance, both in the operational and crash worthy aspects of the automobile, for that \$700 payment.

*Industry groups:* In recent months, the auto companies, moving as a coalition through their trade body, the Automobile Manufacturers Association and their

technical servant, the Society of Automotive Engineers, are forging new institutions and new industrywide unanimities to stall or fight off the increasing focused expression of the motorist's need for greater vehicle safety. One such institution heavily promoted and influenced by the industry and its tax-exempt agent, the Automotive Safety Foundation, is the Vehicle Equipment Safety Commission—presently adhered to by a majority of States on the urging of State motor vehicle administrators. The VESC is a wholly unnecessary interlayer between the States and the Federal Government that torpedoed the very meaning of federalism and distorts out of all proportion the utility of regional State compacts . . . . It is no coincidence that the AAMVA is presently housing the VESC in its office in Washington and that the Automotive Safety Foundation has granted funds to the AAMVA for VESC promotion.

*The Federal role:* The Federal role has been held to the barest minimum through the efforts of the automobile industry whose overriding objective is to preserve complete control over the design of automobiles and the manner in which they are merchandized.

*The President's Committee for Traffic Safety:* This Committee is an executive agency employing civil servants over whom stand Mr. William Foulis, the executive director, and Dr. Richard Tossell, his assistant. These two men are privately paid by the automobile and insurance industries. The President's Committee really functions only through the Administrative Committee (of the Advisory Council to the President's Committee) which sets the policy. The President's Committee is composed of 16 private citizens and its chairman, William Randolph Hearst, Jr. As a Government agency controlled outright by private automotive interest groups, the President's Committee occupies a place unique in the history of American government. Never before have private business groups established themselves within Government in order to exploit the prestige of the President and his Office. Officials in the Department of Commerce and other Government agencies have repeatedly urged that this anomalous condition be terminated, William Randolph Hearst, Jr., notwithstanding.

*General Services Administration:* GSA trundles along conceding prearranged industry positions, ignoring outside advice by acknowledged specialists . . . in a headlong thrust toward making a mockery out of the legislative intent of the Roberts bill, Public Law 88-515 . . . . [In early 1965] we began to see an attitude by GSA of steering away from the independent and quite competent specialists, and concentrating their receipt of advice and parameters for their standards from the automobile industry . . . . I would say, and I detail it in a book, that the first-year performance by GSA was more a ratification of existing vehicle levels, and could be used and has been used as a promotional device for certain automotive options.

*The State role:* Against such a background and foreground of industry practice and policy, the Federal Government must take a decisive role in highway safety . . . . No longer can we afford to repeat the general invocation—so beloved by the traffic safety establishment—that “the primary responsibility for traffic safety is vested in the States.” In questioning the fervent advocates of this article of faith, I have never been able to derive any revealed justification other than that it was so in the days of William Howard Taft [27th President of the United States (1909-1913)].

*The safety establishment:* As far as the traffic safety establishment is concerned, it is impressive the way it reaches down into local areas, reaches down in many ways. If a local group suddenly gets interested, for example, in traffic safety, it goes to the institutions which hold themselves out as professionals in traffic safety, and it goes to such institutions, such as the National Safety Council or the Automotive Safety Foundation, and it gets an approach to traffic safety which is highly prejudicial to any substantial advance. It is an approach that thinks only in terms largely of the driver’s attitude and behavior, and not in terms of the vehicle’s role. And so the literature that comes flowing throughout the country is this type of literature. In addition, these institutions advise many State safety councils and even State governments; the Automotive Safety Foundation and the Insurance Institute [for Highway Safety] advise these governments, and also vector away any initiative from the vehicle . . . . I contend that we don’t want aviation safety in the hands of people like the National Safety Council and we shouldn’t have automotive safety in the hands of what are, in effect, public relations people.

*Accident records:* The Nation can no longer rely on a private organization—the National Safety Council—for its traffic accident-injury statistics. In no other area of mortality and morbidity statistics has the Government relied on a private organization.

*The fatality rate:* [The increasing number of deaths, estimated at just under 50,000 in 1965] touches on an important point, when the measure of progress so-called in traffic safety is measured exclusively on the basis of the fatality rate per 100 million miles of vehicles traveled. That fatality rate, besides many other problems that it raises flowing from its inherent limitation as a reliable unit of exposure, does not take into account the seriously injured and overall injury totals, and as modern medical science and care permit people who ordinarily would have been killed on the highway to live today in a crippled condition, that serious injury rate becomes all the more important . . . . It is a biased type of measure, in other words.

*The nut behind the wheel:* Yet instead of a rigorous analysis of priorities so as to get the fastest and most efficient safety output from given inputs we hear the incantations about “balanced traffic safety programs” or that it is really all “the nut behind the wheel.” The best that can be said about such thinking is that it is

primitive. A civilized society should want to protect even the nut behind the wheel from paying the ultimate penalty for a moment's carelessness, not to mention protecting the innocent people who get in his way. These and other similar handy mottos are part of a self-serving ideology—there is no better word for it—of traffic safety strongly developed and perpetuated by the automobile industry in order to divert the public's gaze from the role of vehicle design.

Nader singled out one Federal agency for praise:

I view the task of the Federal Government as one of implementing a public policy for automotive safety that brings into operation the scientific and engineering talents and resources of the Nation. It is encouraging to note that, at long last, the thinking and research done by a tiny group of bright, dedicated civil servants in the Bureau of Public Roads' Office of Research and Development is beginning to find verbal receptiveness among the Department of Commerce's top policymakers.

As an example, he quoted Under Secretary of Commerce for Transportation Alan S. Boyd:

Probably the most promising approach to significant, tangible improvements in highway safety in the immediate future lies in the application of modern technology . . . . Its application, in essence, means that we must understand the capabilities and limitations of the driver and then design improvements in the vehicle-highway system to make his driving more reliable and more effective. It means we can prevent accidents or mitigate their consequences by additions or modifications to the vehicle and the roadway.

(Boyd became the first U.S. Secretary of Transportation when the U.S. Department of Transportation, authorized by the Department of Transportation Act of 1966, Public Law 89-670, approved October 15, 1966, began operation on April 1, 1967.)

Nader also praised Secretary of Commerce John T. Connor for drawing on the BPR's findings. Connor had said:

So the Interstate System is getting results. And it is getting them because highway engineers relied on facts and rejected the emotionally and widely held, but fallacious, belief that almost all accidents are somehow caused by driver error or failure, through carelessness or irresponsibility.

This belief stems naturally enough from our system of accident reporting, which tends to be in terms of traffic violations, and from our concept of legal liability, and it has been reinforced by well-publicized "safe driving" campaigns. It leads, of course, to the assumption that, if almost all accidents are caused by driver error, the way to eliminate them is to make all drivers drive better.

And since most motorists consider themselves good drivers, it leads further to the assumption that most accidents are caused by a small group of dangerous accident-prone drivers. Therefore, if we could get them off the road we would not have accidents.

Unfortunately, these assumptions are not supported by the facts. An analysis by the Bureau of Public Roads just last summer showed that almost an entirely different group of drivers is involved in accidents each year, and removing the repeaters—those who have two or more accidents in any one year—would have virtually no effect on the following year's accidents. The facts are that the great bulk of accidents involve average, normally responsible drivers. No one is immune. It is the accumulation of rare accidents, occurring to all too many generally good drivers, that principally account for our annual traffic toll.

The fact is that most drivers, most of the time, are driving near the limits of their ability—considering the complexity of the traffic situation and of the driving task . . . . In our pursuit of safety the emphasis on remedial engineering rather than reprimand represents an important breakthrough.

In response to a question from Senator Robert Kennedy (D-NY.), Nader summarized the thrust of his thinking:

My point, my principal point, is . . . [that] even if people have accidents, even if they make mistakes, even if they are looking out the window, or they are drunk, we should have a second line of defense for these people and for the innocent people that are coming down the road that will be struck by them. It is the second line of defense, via the crash-worthy automobile, that should be our first priority because it is the one that is the most under our control and the one that is most enduring.

With his main point in mind, Nader offered an agenda for highway safety that he said was founded on two operating principles:

- (4) Safety measures that do not rely on or require people's voluntary and repeated cooperation are more effective and more reliable than those that do;
- (5) The sequence of events that leads to an accident injury can be broken by engineering measures even before there is a complete understanding of the causal chain.

He added:

The plain fact is that it is faster, cheaper, and more enduring to build operationally safe and crashworthy automobiles that will prevent death and injury than to build a policy around the impossible goal of having drivers behave perfectly at all times

under all conditions in the operation of a basically unsafe vehicle and often treacherous highway conditions.

He recommended five Federal functions to obtain safer automobile design and construction:

1. *Standards and inspection function.*—The establishment of carefully administered dynamic standards for automobile safety performance to get faster application of known technology and override the barriers to innovation now rampant in the huge bureaucratic structures known as American automobile companies.
2. *Research and development function.*—A Federal facility for research into automobile design safety will serve to advance sharply the state of knowledge and will also encourage and support independent centers of such work around the country and break the near monopoly of automotive engineering presently held by the automobile industry.
3. *Federal support function.*—Financial and technical assistance to the States for the establishment of proficient accident-injury investigative teams to collect the data for future preventive policies and to provide the facts for the just adjudication of legal responsibility instead of the automatic bias of blaming the driver in lieu of an investigation.
4. *Statistical and data processing function.*—With the immense potential offered by the computer for fast, complex, and meaningful data processing and with the forthcoming implementation of the Baldwin amendment pressing the States for more explicit, more uniform, and more adequate highway safety standards, it is all the more incumbent upon the Federal Government to establish a complete statistical facility.
5. *Education and alert function.*—This should involve a governmental contribution to the improved working of the marketplace.

### **National Safety Council Responds**

Howard Pyle and other officials of the National Safety Council had testified before the subcommittee on February 2. When Pyle completed his statement, Chairman Ribicoff began the questioning, clearly with Nader's book in mind. The Chairman pointed out that the statement talked about a Federal role, but he said, "you seem to be reluctant to have the Federal Government play a major role." Pyle replied:

I urge only that the States be given this perhaps one last opportunity to step up to this task.

The Chairman stated that the Action Program "leaves this up to the States and the localities." Pyle said that his understanding was that "there is a solid legal responsibility on the part of local and State governments to take care of most of these problems." The Action Program, therefore, follows "the line of legal obligation." To illustrate how State initiatives can work, he cited the States that approved mandatory seat belt laws as being the primary reason why the automobile industry had adopted seat belts.



Asked about Federal legislation relating to vehicle design, Pyle said he did not see a need for additional legislation in view of the Roberts Bill. When Pyle asserted that the GSA standards for government vehicles were prompting changes in all vehicles, Ribicoff flatly disagreed:

Well, it hasn't. Do you think if they hadn't been brought in here to testify that the automobile industry would have gone along with some of the items on the GSA list?

Ribicoff noted Pyle's early opposition to the Baldwin Amendment (Pyle had said, "Arbitrary traffic engineering requirements are creeping into Federal laws financing our national highway network."). Pyle indicated his early opposition was based on funding sanctions in the original version of the amendment. Removing the sanctions, the Chairman said, had left the amendment little more than "a pious statement." When Pyle replied that he thought the final measure was acceptable, Ribicoff was dismissive of the Commerce Secretary's efforts to implement the amendment. He asked Pyle, "Do you know anything that the Secretary of Commerce has achieved?" Pyle said he could not speak for the Secretary, but knew the Department was working on the standards.

Ribicoff asked if the 1946 Action Program was an outgrowth of the ASF's program. Pyle, not having been present at the time, was unsure, but said:

In any event, going up to the 1946 White House Conference, it was clear that a basic policy statement in each of the various disciplines that go to make up the program was required. Committees worked many, many months to develop the reports before the White House Conference. The ASF program and the action program were each but a chapter in a sequence of events that began with the Hoover Conference in 1924 at which time ASF could not have been involved because it did not exist.

Chairman Ribicoff also questioned the validity of measuring deaths by fatalities per one hundred million vehicles miles traveled rather than using population as a base. Pyle asked statistician Gene Miller to respond:

The mileage death rate is one way of looking at the frequency of deaths in relation to the exposure to death . . . . That is exactly what it does measure, the number of deaths in relation to exposure to death.

Miller acknowledged the criticism that the fatality rate does not measure the total accident problem:

But experts through the years have searched for a better way of measuring the accident problem, and all of the experts, including people from the Federal Establishment, have not been able to find a better method.

The Council submitted a statement that acknowledged that using the population rate would allow comparisons with accidents from other causes. However, because the population rate “completely disregards the sharp rise which has taken place through the years in the number of motor vehicles, which is the agent of death, it has limited use as a measure of the motor vehicle problem.”

Following Nader’s appearance on February 10, the Council wanted to respond to his comments about the organization. On March 3, Pyle submitted a letter to Chairman Ribicoff, noting that the council could not permit Nader’s statements questioning the Council’s motives to stand in the record without refutation. Because Nader’s “so-called facts and his opinions,” as expressed in his testimony, were based on his book, Pyle enclosed a statement on *Unsafe at Any Speed* that he said “will suffice to show that his questions about the council’s motives are based on inaccurate and erroneous information.” The correspondence was included in the record of the hearings.

Pyle summarized the three primary allegations against the Council:

1. We have ignored vehicle engineering as an important aspect of accident control.
2. We concentrate on the driver chiefly to divert attention from the vehicle.
3. We have adopted this course because of financial support we have received from the auto and related industries.

In response, the statement listed articles, speeches, testimony, and other material expressing concerns about the vehicle, dating to 1924. The Council was, the statement indicated, one of the organizations that sponsored the Hoover Conference that produced a report on “Motor Vehicles” which contained “26 recommendations on design for safety and 3 recommendations on regulation of design.”

The statement also contradicted Nader’s claim that the Action Program had not been updated since 1949:

He’s wrong. It was thoroughly revised in 1960, and two new sections were added, in 1963 and 1965. A strong role was played by the council in the 1960 revision of the action program for highway safety, adding a vehicle engineering section which remains the best single policy guide today.

As for industry support, the statement responded:

The “powerful support” that is supposed to effectively gag the council’s criticism of auto industry safety performance consists of a little more than 14 percent of the \$2,960,000 the council spent in 1965 for programs aimed at traffic accidents and about 6 percent of its total income . . . . Vital as this money is to the council’s activities in field services, the traffic inventory, accident data and research correlation, and driver education in schools, credulity is taxed when it is described as powerful support that could stifle criticism, and the amount is paltry in the light of traffic safety’s needs.

The statement also disputed Nader's claim that the industry was heavily represented on the Council's Board of Directors:

Of the 201 members of the board, 13 are directly employed by auto manufacturers. Six of the thirteen are engaged in employee safety programs for their companies, and one is a farm equipment engineer. Another group of 14 might be described as auto related if you include tire and oil people, a trailer manufacturer, a Georgia auto finance company, and two men from Du Pont because their company once controlled GM and undoubtedly still sells them things such as paint and glass laminates.

In addition, the statement denied that the Council reviewed a draft of the 1959 report on *The Federal Role in Highway Safety* and disputed Nader's claims about accident statistics by referring to a statement at the time of the Council's earlier testimony responding to Assistant Secretary Moynihan's similar claims. (Of Moynihan's testimony, the Council had said that he tended "to be rather freewheeling in his rhetoric, his testimony is internally inconsistent, it includes some serious errors, and it is at variance with other testimony at the hearings.")

As for Nader's questioning of the validity of the Action Program, the statement said, "The degree of proof of the validity of action program recommendations varies widely from section to section." The engineering section was heavily supported by research, while other sections, such as those on education and public information, were based on "the pertinent sciences but need additional research." The statement added that a "multiple correlation study" relating program and nonprogram factors to accident rates was nearing completion.

A "misleading and major flaw" in Nader's book and testimony was "his failure to discuss actual use of seat belts as a vital precondition for full effectiveness of vehicle design improvements." The Council would, the statement said, continue to promote seat belt use.

The statement also denied that the council "blames the driver rather than the vehicle." It pointed out that "the driver must cope with vehicle or road conditions as he finds them." Moreover, "There is a difference between short-range and long-range goals in public education."

The March 1996 issue of *Traffic Safety* contained a similar rebuttal, "Unfair at Any Rate," to Nader's book by the Council's Publications Director, Jack Horner. Although referring to *Unsafe at Any Speed* as "unquestionably the most devastating public attack ever made against the auto industry and the organized safety movement," Horner considered the book "an expert and provocative demonstration of the prosecution tactic of presenting only one side to the jury." Horner said he wanted to speak for the "people who *are* the National Safety Council" because they deserve to have the allegations refuted "for most of the accusations are distorted or untrue, and all of them are unfair at

any rate.” After going through many of the arguments included in the statement Pyle placed in the hearing record, Horner concluded:

Any who is inclined to apply to this book the old adage that “where there’s smoke, there’s fire,” should also remember that a fire smokes the most when the fuel is all wet.

### **An Investigation Backfires**

In early March 1966, articles in *The New Republic*, *The New York Times*, and other publications reported that GM had hired a private investigator shortly before publication of *Unsafe at Any Speed* to find evidence that could be used to discredit the young author and undercut his attacks on the corporation and the Corvair. The articles indicated that GM, through its investigators, had employed women to proposition Nader in apparent attempt to blackmail him. Because Nader’s parents had been born in Lebanon, the investigators repeatedly asked acquaintances about possible anti-Semitism on his part.

When news of the GM investigation became public, GM President James Roche issued a press release on March 9 acknowledging that GM had initiated a “routine investigation through a reputable law firm to determine whether Ralph Nader was acting on behalf of litigants or their attorneys in Corvair design cases.” The statement explained that the investigation had been “limited only to Mr. Nader’s qualifications, background, expertise and association with such attorneys.” The investigation, moreover, “did not include any of the alleged harassment or intimidation recently reported in the press.”

Chairman Ribicoff, concerned that the GM investigation suggested an attempt to intimidate a witness before the subcommittee, summoned Roche to testify on March 22. The publicity surrounding the investigation led to a standing room only crowd and a national television audience for the hearing.

In his opening statement, Roche took responsibility for the investigation and disavowed it:

Let me make clear at the outset that I deplore the kind of harassment to which Mr. Nader has apparently been subjected. I am just as shocked and outraged by some of the incidents which Mr. Nader has reported as the members of this committee.

As president of General Motors, I hold myself fully responsible for any action authorized or initiated by any officer of the corporation which may have had any bearing on the incidents related to our investigation of Mr. Nader.

He had not known of the investigation, he said, but added in the fourth paragraph:

I am not here to excuse, condone, or justify in any way our investigating Mr. Nader. To the extent that General Motors bears responsibility, I want to

apologize here and now to the members of this subcommittee and Mr. Nader. I sincerely hope that these apologies will be accepted. Certainly I bear Mr. Nader no ill will.

While taking responsibility, Roche indicated he had not known of the investigation while it was underway or when he approved the March 9 press release:

To say that I wish I had known about it earlier is an understatement—and I intend to make certain that we are informed of similar problems of this magnitude in the future.

He was particularly concerned that the episode might appear to confirm the allegation that GM was not interested in traffic safety:

We know that any automobile is subject to accident and that we must be constantly devising and improving ways to protect the occupants and others. If our concern for safety has not always come through with sufficient clarity and vigor in previous statements, including our statement before this subcommittee last summer, then I can assure you that we regret that failure.

He added:

I do want to stress that General Motors is expanding its research, engineering and testing in all areas of safety, including that of the second collision and the causes of both accidents and injuries . . . . We are, in short, in all our plans and calculations, giving safety a priority second to none. And we consider this to be our duty.

After extensive and skeptical questioning of Roche and top GM officials involved in the investigation, the committee recalled Nader. He told the subcommittee:

It is not easy for me to convey in words what I had to endure and what my family has had to endure, as anyone subjected to such an exposure can appreciate . . . . I should be the last to expect that after General Motors tripped over my book, it would respond as one chastened. Any critic must expect a focused interest in his doings, as they pertain to the subject, by the object of his criticism. But certainly there should be, in all decency, an economy to be observed in the exercise of such corporate curiosity. Surely the questioning by private detectives of people who know and have worked with me (including the crippled and pained person to whom my book is dedicated) as to my personal life in an attempt to obtain lurid details and grist for the invidious use and metastasis of slurs and slanders goes well beyond affront and becomes generalizable as an encroachment upon a more public interest.

Nader admitted to feeling some intimidation:

I am not particularly sensitive to criticism at all. In fact I probably have an armor like a turtle when it comes to that. I like to give and take. As an attorney one is used to it. I don't intimidate easily, but I must confess that one begins to have second thoughts of the penalties and the pain which must be incurred in working in this area.

He was, however, determined to continue on the same path:

I think the thing that has persuaded me to continue in this area is that I cannot accept a climate in this country where one has to have an ascetic existence and steely determination in order to speak truthfully, candidly and critically of American industry, and the auto industry.

Chairman Ribicoff told Nader:

I want to say to you, Mr. Nader, also for the sake of you and your family, that . . . I have read copies of all the investigatory reports. In all fairness to you, you have come out with a complete clean bill of health and character, with nothing derogatory having been adduced. While you have suffered as a result of this, for whatever it is worth, you do have the satisfaction of knowing that the detective agencies, at the rate of \$6,700, haven't been able to find a thing on you.

The resulting publicity made *Unsafe at Any Speed* a bestseller and helped focus the highway safety debate on the auto industry.

### **Moving Out of the Stone Age of Ignorance**

In 1966, the BPR's National Driver Register logged its 20 millionth search. The 20 millionth search caught an Iowa driver license applicant who had a Texas conviction for drunk driving. The register included about 860,000 drivers by then, and conducted about 900,000 checks a month. About 120,000 checks had identified applicants whose license had been revoked in another State for driving while intoxicated or who had been convicted for a violation involving a fatality.

Fatalities on the Nation's highways exceeded 49,000 in 1965. President Johnson said, "The gravest problem before this nation—next to war in Vietnam—is the death and destruction, the shocking and senseless carnage that strikes daily on our highways." Under Secretary of Commerce for Transportation Boyd called for "revolutionary, not evolutionary progress" on highway safety.

On March 2, 1966, the President responded to the crisis by submitting major proposals on motor vehicle safety standards and highway safety standards. After describing the growth in vehicles (31 million motor vehicles 20 years earlier, 90 million the mid-1960's, 120 million expected by 1975) and paved roads (1.5 million 20 years earlier, almost

double that in the 1960's), he explained that America's highway system "is not good enough when it builds superhighways for supercharged automobiles and yet cannot find a way to prevent 50,000 highway deaths this year." He predicted that unless something is done, 100,000 lives would be lost in 1975.

Before outlining his proposals, he commented:

Neither private industry nor Government officials concerned with automotive transportation have made safety first among their priorities. Yet we know that expensive freeways, powerful engines, and smooth exteriors will not stop the massacre on our roads.

State and local resources are insufficient to bring about swift reduction in the highway death rate. The Federal Government must provide additional resources. Existing programs must be expanded. Pioneer work must begin in neglected areas . . . . The people of America deserve an aggressive highway safety program.

In addition to his safety proposals, the President submitted a proposal to create a U.S. Department of Transportation that would unite the Federal Government's modal agencies in a Cabinet-level department.

Senator Magnuson predicted that the second session of the 89<sup>th</sup> Congress would be known as "the automobile safety Congress."

The Administration and the Senate rejected amendments proposed by the automobile industry. The Department of Justice informed Senator Magnuson's Commerce Committee that "the industry proposal suffers from at least six basic shortcomings." For example, the industry proposed to amend the bill to require the Federal Government to work through the Vehicle Equipment Safety Commission, a change that "would in practice delay the introduction of new safety devices and leave the timing on introduction of new devices largely in the hands of the industry."

When a delegation of Governors met with the President, he urged them to work with their congressional delegations to speed approval of the bills. Governor Clifford P. Hansen of Wyoming, speaking to reporters for the delegation after the meeting, urged passage, especially of the new safety standards for automobiles. He told reporters, "We find it difficult to see where the states could set these new car standards." Governor George P. Romney of Michigan, the industry's home State, recommended giving the States a major role in devising the safety standards, as well as final authority in enforcing them. The President said, "I cannot stress too strongly the need" for Federal standards:

The only alternative is unthinkable—50 different standards for 50 different states. This will breed chaos.

In July, the Senate passed S. 3005 (the motor vehicle safety act) and S. 3052 (the highway safety act), both strengthening the President's proposals. President Johnson said:

This is landmark legislation. It will move us out of the Stone Age of ignorance and inaction. For the first time in our history, we can mount a truly comprehensive attack on the rising toll of death and destruction on the nation's highways.

Senator Ribicoff, who had closed his hearings on the Federal Role in Highway Safety after the May 22 hearing on GM's harassment of Ralph Nader, was "very pleased" with the bill.

In the House of Representatives, the Committee on Interstate Commerce (which had jurisdiction over the motor vehicle bill) and the Committee on Public Works (which had jurisdiction over the highway safety bill) were responsible for the bills. During floor debate on the motor vehicle law, Chairman Harley O. Staggers (D-WV) of the Commerce Committee said, "the slaughter on the highways will not be materially reduced without the active and formal participation of the federal government" in regulating the motor vehicle. Chairman Fallon of the Public Works Committee said his Highway Safety Act of 1966 emphasized the traditional Federal-State relationship under the Federal-aid highway program. It "places responsibility for action on highway safety in the states, where it properly belongs."

The House bills were viewed as stronger than their Senate counterparts. Following House approval of the bills, a Conference Committee was formed to consider differences in the Senate and House versions. On August 30, the Conference Report was released, with the stronger House version generally prevailing.

On September 9, 1966, President Johnson signed the two safety bills during a ceremony in the Rose Garden at the White House. In remarks before signing the bills, the President began by pointing out that over the Labor Day weekend, 29 Americans died in Vietnam. During that same weekend, 614 Americans died on the Nation's highways. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he said, nearly three times as many Americans died in traffic accidents as died "in all our wars." Every day, 9,000 were killed or injured:

It makes auto accidents the biggest cause of death and injury among Americans under 35. And if our accident rate continues, one out of every two Americans can look forward to being injured by a car during his lifetime—one out of every two!

He knew this wasn't a new problem. He recalled that 10 years earlier in the United States Senate he had warned that "the deadly toll of highway accidents demands our prompt action." This was a responsibility, he said, Congress would someday have to face. "Now, finally, we are facing it."



He described the two bills:

The first act we sign into law is the Traffic Safety Act . . . . Starting with our 1968 models, American and foreign,

--We are going to assure our citizens that every new car they buy is as safe as modern knowledge knows how to build it.

--We are going to protect drivers against confusing and misleading tire standards.

He cited the Federal research and testing centers that would be established under the law:

For years now, we have spent millions of dollars to understand and to fight polio and other childhood diseases. Yet up until now we have tolerated a raging epidemic of highway death—which has killed more of our youth than all other diseases combined.

With the Highway Safety Act, he said, we would learn more about highway disease “and we are going to find out how to cure it.” He said:

In this age of space, we are getting plenty of information about how to send men into space and how to bring them home. Yet we don’t know for certain whether more auto accidents are caused by faulty brakes, or by soft shoulders, or by drunk drivers, or even by deer crossing the highway . . . . The Highway Safety Act will create a Federal-State partnership for learning these facts:

--We are going to establish a National Driver Register to protect all of our citizens against drivers whose licenses have been suspended or revoked.

--We are going to support better programs of driver education and better programs for licensing and auto inspection.

--We are going to ask every State to participate in safety programs and to conform to uniform driver and pedestrian safety performance standards.

He added that “there is nothing new or radical about all this.” As he explained:

Every other form of transportation is already covered by Federal safety standards. The food we buy, the food we eat, has been under Federal safety standards since way back before I was born—1906.

But the automobile industry has been one of our Nation’s most dynamic and inventive industries. I hope, and I believe, that its skill and imagination will somehow be able to build in more safety—without building on more costs.

He concluded:

I am especially proud at this moment to sign these bills which I believe promise, in the years to come, to cure the highway disease: to end the years of horror and to give us, instead, years of hope.

The National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966, Public Law 89-563, contained the following provisions, as summarized by Harry N. Rosenfield in *Traffic Safety*:

Mandatory initial federal motor vehicle safety standards for new motor vehicles to be issued by Jan. 31, 1967, and new and revised federal standards on or before Jan. 31, 1968. "Motor vehicle safety standards" are defined to include "performance . . . in such a manner that the public is protected against unreasonable risk of accidents occurring as a result of the design, construction, or performance . . . and included nonoperational safety."

"Uniform" federal performance standards (to be issued no later than two years after enactment of law) "applicable to all used motor vehicles."

National Motor Vehicle Safety Advisory Council of members appointed by the secretary (with a majority to represent the general public including state and local governments, and the remainder to represent motor vehicle and equipment manufacturers and motor vehicle dealers). The secretary "shall consult with the advisory council on motor vehicle safety standards under this act" for both new and used car standards" and he must also consult with the VESC in prescribing new car standards.

The ICC must conform its safety regulations over buses and trucks to those of the secretary, except that the ICC may prescribe higher standards subsequent to manufacture of the vehicles.

Administration of the law is to be through a National Traffic Safety Agency within the Department of Commerce by a Presidentially appointed administrator.

Vehicle manufacturers shall furnish notice of safety defects (a) to purchasers and also to subsequent purchasers to whom the warranty was transferred; (b) to dealers, and (c) to the secretary, who may order a manufacturer to make further notification.

The secretary shall require that new cars be equipped with tires that have labels including (a) identification of the manufacturer or retreader; (b) composition and number of plies; (c) "the maximum permissible load for the tire;" (d) recital of conformity with federal standards . . . . In order to assist the consumer, the secretary shall issue standards, within two years after enactment, establishing "a uniform quality grading system" for tires.

The secretary shall develop and test experimental and demonstration motor vehicles and motor vehicle systems and equipment . . . .

Violations are subject to civil penalty, not to exceed \$1,000 per violation, with \$400,000 maximum for any related series of violations.

The secretary is authorized to study the need for facilities for research, development and testing in traffic safety and testing relating to the safety of all machinery used on, or in connection with maintenance of, highways with particular reference to tractor safety, and report by Dec. 31, 1967.

[Patents] resulting from federally supported research shall be freely and fully available to the public.

The Highway Safety Act, Public Law 89-564, required each State to implement a safety program, subject to Federal-aid highway funding penalties. The Secretary of Commerce was given responsibility for the program. (Responsibility would be shifted to the Secretary of Transportation when the U.S. Department of Transportation was established on April 1, 1967.) The bill spelled out minimum standards for the State programs, but the Secretary was to consult with States and localities on standards. The act was to be administered by an agency within the Department under an Administrator appointed by the President. The bill called for establishment of a National Highway Safety Advisory Committee to be composed of 30 members appointed by the President. In addition, the bill required detailed reports to Congress, priority for safety projects on the Federal-aid systems, a study on alcoholism, and a research program.

To serve as Director of the National Traffic Safety Agency and the National Highway Safety Agency, President Johnson nominated a single individual: Dr. William Haddon, Jr., M.D. A graduate of the Harvard Medical School and the Harvard School of Public Health, Haddon had served as Director of the Driver Research Center of the New York State Department of Health and the State Department of Motor vehicles from 1957 to 1961. At the time of his nomination, he was Acting Assistant Commissioner, Public Health Research, Development and Evaluation, and Director, Epidemiology Residency Program for the New York State Department of Health.

Haddon has been affiliated with many groups, including the Advisory Council of the President's Committee for Traffic Safety, the National Safety Council, and Consumers Union. In October 1963, the National Safety Council had presented its Metropolitan Life Award of Merit to Haddon for research in accident prevention. Among Haddon's many publications was the book *Accident Research: Approaches and Methods* (cowritten with Edward A. Suchman and published by Harper and Row, 1964).

During his work in New York, Haddon had been an associate of Assistant Secretary Moynihan on the New York State Traffic Safety Policy Coordinating Committee. Moynihan, in fact, had discussed Haddon's ideas while testifying before Senator

Ribicoff's subcommittee. He praised *Accident Research: Methods and Approaches* as a "brilliant study." He told the subcommittee:

The main thesis of the book, which is a systematic collection of the work of many men is that the etiology of accidents is not different from that of other insults to the body: they are a health problem to be investigated and controlled by fundamentally the same methods that have worked with other health problems.

Moynihan also quoted from a private communication he had received from Dr. Haddon:

Accidents are the only remaining major source of human morbidity and mortality still substantially viewed by educated and uneducated alike in extra-rational terms (this includes, to a substantial extent, the present motor vehicle related power structure, with its exhortatory approach.) This is a carryover from the time when all of the other hazards to man's health and well-being—for example, the infections, plagues, famines, and hazards of childbirth—were similarly viewed. If this extra-rational approach is justified, this area becomes a major point of departure for theologians and philosophers. If not, at least the educated and especially those responsible for public policy in relation to motor vehicle and many other kinds of accidents, including those among the elderly and the very young, should understand this area in rational terms and act accordingly, that we may terminate our present, annual, blood sacrifice to official, professional, and public ignorance and lack of the professionalization required.

Moynihan also provided, for the record, his review of the book for *The Reporter* on December 31, 1964. At one point, the review said:

From now on any student of accident prevention must begin with this book. To read it is to be present at the occasions, one after the other, on which someone for the first time has asked, "Why?"

Upon his nomination as dual Director of highway and motor vehicle safety, Dr. Haddon issued a statement:

The President has identified our present highway casualty rate of over 9,000 injured per day as the nation's second most important problem after Viet Nam. He has also pointed out quite clearly, as have Governor Pyle and many others, that the complexity and difficult of this problem will require a long and difficult effort. We neither can not shall attempt its solution alone. It is essential that there be a truly dedicated and cooperative national effort. Our emphasis from her will be to make certain that all of the bases are covered. In this the maximum participation of the National Safety Council will surely be needed if we are to accomplish our goals.

Former Governor Pyle attended the signing ceremony for the twin safety bills and received one of the pens the President used to sign them. Pyle saw the new laws as "the

beginning of a new era in traffic accident prevention.” It was hard, however, to adjust to the changing times. He warned against complacency:

The acts do not replace a single force that has been at work on traffic safety, but instead lend a much-needed hand to all of them. Indeed, the new acts to a great extent make clear where the primary responsibilities for traffic safety lie—with auto manufacturers, with state and local governments, with the many safety councils and other private groups that have been working to develop and support better safety programs, and with every individual motorist and citizen in the nation.

Despite all the important provisions of the new laws, he said that success in the war on accidents “depends on all of us.” He concluded his statement by saying:

Each of us must become safer drivers and pedestrians and give our elected and appointed officials our full support as they take those steps that will secure fit drivers in fit vehicles, on good roads, through such programs as driver education in the schools, public education, more effective licensing procedures, periodic vehicle inspection, improved traffic supervision, expanded traffic engineering efforts, and improved emergency services.

The headline in the September 5 edition of *Automotive News* reflected the industry’s view of the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966:

#### TOUGH SAFETY LAW STRIPS AUTO INDUSTRY OF FREEDOM

The accompanying article by Washington Bureau Chief Helen Kahn explained that the law emerged from the Conference Committee “as much stronger than anyone could have imagined 15 months ago when the factories first tangled with Senator Abraham Ribicoff, Connecticut Democrat.”

She described Chairman Ribicoff’s proposal as “mild” and the Administration’s proposal as “somewhat stronger, fed as it had been by the public awareness brought about largely by a relatively unknown lawyer named Ralph Nader.” The Senate version had been “tough,” but the House had strengthened its version, Kahn said, to avoid the appearance that it had “sold out” to the industry. “Instead of a weakening, the conferees chose the strongest sections of both bills.”

Kahn summarized the evolving position of the industry on the legislation:

After starting from the position of “no bill at all,” the industry shifted to a bill that would permit them and the states through the Vehicle Equipment Safety Commission to set standards and give the Commerce Secretary “discretionary” authority.

After considerable unfavorable publicity, involving splashing headlines about General Motors-hired detectives and Ralph Nader and defect notification, the auto industry came to the House hearings asking for mandatory standards, but still wanting a major role for the VESC.

In the end, John Bugas, the Vice President of Ford Motor Company who represented the Automobile Manufacturers Association at the hearings, called the bill “constructive legislation.”

On November 9, 1966, Dr. Haddon became Director of the BPR’s twin National Traffic Safety Bureau and the National Highway Safety Bureau. With the April 1967 creation of the U.S. Department of Transportation, the new Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) became the Nation’s highway agency and incorporated the two safety bureaus. They were consolidated by Executive Order into the National Highway Safety Bureau (NHSB) under Dr. Haddon on June 6, 1967. He resigned on February 14, 1969, and became President of the IIHS. (In April 1970, Secretary of Transportation John A. Volpe removed the NHSB from the FHWA so it could report directly to him. Under Section 202 of the Highway Safety Act of 1970 (Title II of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1970, which President Nixon signed on December 31, 1970), the NHSB became the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, as it is still called.)

(Moynihan served Presidents Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, Nixon, and Gerald Ford before winning election to the United States Senate in 1976. When he retired in December 2000, he was hailed as a scholar-politician who often expressed controversial views that eventually become policy. In his work on the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, he would influence highway and transit legislation for years, culminating in the landmark Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991, which established the framework of the post-Interstate era.)

### **Overtaken By Events**

Section 102(a) of the Highway Safety Act of 1966 repealed the Baldwin Amendment adopted in 1965 (Section 135 of Title 23, United States Code). Its purpose had been supplanted by a much stronger provision, Section 402 of Title 23. Section 402(a) read:

Each State shall have a highway safety program approved by the Secretary, designed to reduce traffic accidents and deaths, injuries, and property damage resulting therefrom. Such programs shall be in accordance with uniform standards promulgated by the Secretary. Such uniform standards shall be expressed in terms of performance criteria. Such uniform standards shall be promulgated by the Secretary so as to improve driver performance (including, but not limited to, driver education, driver testing to determine proficiency to operate motor vehicles, driver examinations (both physical and mental) and driver licensing) and to improve pedestrian performance. In addition such uniform standards shall include, but not be limited to, provisions for an effective record system of accidents (including injuries and deaths resulting therefrom), accident

investigations to determine the probable causes of accidents, injuries, and deaths, vehicle registration, operation, and inspection, highway design and maintenance (in-vehicle lighting, markings, and surface treatment), traffic control, vehicle codes and laws, surveillance of traffic for detection and correction of high or potentially high accident locations, and emergency services. Such standards as are applicable to State highway safety programs shall, to the extent determined appropriate by the Secretary, be applicable to federally administered areas where a Federal department or agency controls the highways or supervises traffic operations. The Secretary shall be authorized to amend or waive standards on a temporary basis for the purpose of evaluating new or different highway safety programs instituted on an experimental, pilot, or demonstration basis by one or more States, where the Secretary finds that the public interest would be served by such amendment or waiver.

Section 402(b) prohibited the Secretary from approving a State highway safety program under certain circumstances. For example, a program could not be approved if the Governor was responsible for its administration or it did not authorize political subdivisions to carry out local highway safety programs as part of the State program. Additional subsections provided additional guidance on the programs. (Section 402 remains in Title 23 today, expanded around the core of the 1966 language.)

The Highway Safety Act of 1966 authorized \$67 million to carry out Section 402 in Fiscal Year 1967, and \$100 million for the following 2 years.

Despite this strengthened program, the Committee on Public Works was not happy about the fate of Section 135 of Title 23. Its report on the House version (House Report No. 1700, dated July 15, 1966) was organized as a discussion on the Baldwin Amendment. After reprinting the original amendment, with its requirement for funding sanctions, and the House report language accompanying it, the discussion pointed out that the version that became law “had been reduced to a simple expression of belief that the States should have highway safety programs.”

The Public Works Committee had “fought bitterly to hold section 135 as the House had passed it.” In the end, Committee members had to yield:

But the basic and urgent purpose of Senate Joint Resolution 81, was to provide interim approval of apportionment of funds for the Interstate System. The managers on the part of the House accepted the amended version of what it had reported as the Baldwin amendment. Even hortatory language was better than nothing in the face of the shocking highway safety situation about which the committee, legislatively responsible for the Nation’s highways, was [so] deeply concerned.

Following enactment of the watered-down Baldwin Amendment, the Committee “maintained diligent contact with the Department of Commerce, anxious to learn what

progress the Secretary was making” in developing voluntary standards. “There was no real progress.”

The discussion recounted the events leading to passage of the Highway Safety Act of 1966, including the President’s message, hearings by the Committee, and introduction of his proposals in the form of a House bill on March 3, 1966. The President’s proposals were “highly desirable,” but the discussion pointed out that all had been “incorporated in the original Baldwin amendment.”

Following hearings, the Committee had revised the bill to incorporate the best of the Administration’s recommendations while correcting what the Committee considered their weaknesses. After thanking participants in the hearings, the discussion explained:

Millions upon millions of words have been written about safety. We have had the automobile for more than 60 years, and for almost all of that time many of the States and their political subdivisions have had programs of some kind designed to regulate the use of the automobile in the interest of public safety. For 40 years the various safety-related organizations, both public and private, have been trying to persuade the several State legislatures to adopt at least minimum uniform regulatory statutes, with lamentable lack of success.

All State have some statutes; a few States have fairly extensive statutes; only a handful of States have undertaken comprehensive highway safety programs and even these are handicapped by gaps and deficiencies and inadequate financing. The committee applauds the efforts the States have made. It recognizes the paramount role the States must play in any future program, for it is, after all, the States who must register the automobiles, license the drivers, educate the children, police the traffic, and enforce the laws.

It is undeniable that to the extent there has been governmental leadership in highway safety, it has come from the States. Nevertheless, admirable as the progressive programs in a few States are, they are insufficient and there are far too few of them. If the facts were otherwise, the House would not have passed the Baldwin amendment last year and the present legislation would not now be under consideration.

The Public Works Committee is as jealous of the prerogatives of the States as any committee of the Congress, perhaps more so than most . . . . But we learn from experience, and experience in this field clearly demonstrates that if we continue to rely on voluntary action in highway safety, a larger percentage of the citizens of these United States is going to wind up in a smashup. Mandatory compliance with broad Federal highway safety standards could be made to seem very unpopular (and the committee realizes that there will be those who will attempt to accomplish exactly that), simply because to the average motorist, the prospect of accident, injury, or death does not apply to him . . . .



While recognizing that Section 402 was stronger than the Baldwin Amendment, the Committee wanted to make a few points:

The Baldwin amendment has been law for almost a year. No meaningful progress has been made in the development of standards under that legislation.

For that reason, the Committee had been more specific in Section 402(a), set a deadline for development of the standards, and added other provisions to ensure action will take place:

The Federal Government can and must assume a position of leadership in this field. The actual working programs must remain in the hands of the States. Surely all of these safeguards are sufficient to ensure that the Federal program, working through the Secretary of Commerce, will enhance, not impair, the responsibilities of the States.

In recommending passage of the Highway Safety Act of 1966, the Committee added:

In doing so, we pause to express a debt of gratitude. John Baldwin, the author of the Baldwin amendment upon which this Highway Safety Act is based, served on the Public Works Committee from the time he came to the Congress from California in January 1955. His death on March 9, 1966, one week after the President's safety message was received by the House, saddened every member of this committee. But even in death, as he had so often done in life, he strengthened us. However it may become known, whoever may wear the mantle of credit for it, for the members of the Public Works Committee this legislation will always evoke the image of John Baldwin. We would be less than the men we would like to be if we failed here to acknowledge our debt to him for his leadership in meeting the Federal responsibility in highway safety. No man worked harder—nor left behind him a committee of colleagues more determined to see his task completed and his goal achieved.

In this statement, the Committee made clear its expectation of the prospects for reducing fatalities and injuries on the Nation's highways:

Safety has become this year's most popular crusade, which is all to the good, but accident reduction is quite another matter . . . . As the National Safety Council has so realistically remarked, the real test is how much safety will actually emerge from all this talk. The answer, for the immediate future, is what it has been for 50 years—only so much as the individual citizen is determined it shall be. The cold-blooded fact is that it may be too late to do anything about the 50,000 people who are going to die this year, and probably those who may die next year, and perhaps even the year after.

But, if we insist now upon a mandatory program, we may be able to keep more and more of our parents, and our husbands and wives, and our children, and our friends, and ourselves, alive in the years after that.

### **The Aftermath**

Each year after 1966, fatalities increased, while the fatality rate declined. Fatalities reached an all-time high in 1972, when 54,589 people died on the highways (a rate of 4.3). In 1973, the number of fatalities declined slightly to 54,052 (4.1).

On October 17, 1973, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, acting at the request of Middle East nations upset by American policy on Israel, announced a boycott on shipments of oil to the United States. In the midst of the energy crisis touched off by the boycott, President Richard M. Nixon signed the Emergency Highway Energy Conservation Act on January 2, 1974. Under the new law, the FHWA could not approve highway projects in any State having a maximum speed limit over 55 m.p.h. President Nixon estimated the new speed limit would save nearly 200,000 barrels of fuel a day.

Whether because of the reduced speed, increased energy consciousness on the part of the American people, or a combination of these and other factors, the disruption in oil supplies resulted in the first significant reduction in the number of fatalities since World War II. Fatalities declined to 45,196 in 1974.

The number of fatalities would climb to over 51,000 again in 1979 and 1980, before beginning a gradual decline to 39,230 in 1992 (1.7). For 2002, NHTSA announced on July 17, 2003, that highway fatalities had reached the highest level since 1990 at 42,815. The fatality rate of 1.51 was a historic low.