ATSSA’s Roadway Safety Program

“To Advance Roadway Safety”
The Need for Safer Roads

In 2000, 41,821 people lost their lives on our roadways. Another 3.2 million were injured in crashes (2).

Over the last decade (1991-2000), roadway fatalities totaled 412,558 (1).

In 2000, 1093 people lost their lives in work zones, representing a 26% increase from the 1999 total of 868. This figure has increased every year for the past 5 years, and is likely to increase further as we invest in our infrastructure, unless significant action is taken (4).

A murder takes place in the United States every 34 minutes. A highway death occurs every 13 minutes (3).

Since 1775, approximately 620,000 Americans have lost their lives in wars. Since 1900, over 3,000,000 people have died on our roadways (6).

Using Bureau of Labor statistics, the economic cost of the fatalities of the last decade is estimated at $404,306,840,000. This does not include the cost of temporary and permanent injuries (7).

AN AGGRAVATED ASSAULT OCCURS EVERY 35 SECONDS. A ROADWAY INJURY OCCURS EVERY 15 SECONDS (8).
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“There is abundant evidence to demonstrate that highway design is the important causative factor in the national traffic accident experience. Although some degree of human failure is necessarily present even in accidents where faulty design is the controlling cause, evidence indicates that in the great percentage of such instances proper design would discount human failure by guarding the motorist or pedestrian from exposure to hazard. The highway is static, the human element and the vehicle are animate; consequently of the three the highway is the most susceptible to control. It is illogical to insist upon a safe human element and safe vehicles on an unsafe highway.”

Harold F Hammond, Director
Traffic Division
The National Conservation Bureau, 1934
Introduction

Every year for the past five years, nearly 42,000 motorists have lost their lives on America’s roadways. In excess of 3,000,000 individuals are injured annually. If the average U.S. crash rate remains unchanged, one child out of every 84 born today will die violently in a motor vehicle crash. Furthermore, 6 out of every 10 children will be injured in a highway crash over a lifetime, many of them more than once.

In order to reduce the number of fatalities and injuries on our roadways, we must focus on three key components – the automobile, driver behavior, and the roadway itself. Much attention has already been given to making automobiles safer. They are subjected to crash testing to minimum levels. Every auto manufactured today includes “shoulder harness” type seat belts that are safer than the original seat-belt design. Many vehicles come equipped with driver and passenger air bags, and an increasing number also include side air bags. In recent years, more vehicles have come equipped with anti-lock disk brakes. Infant seats are safer, and considerable effort has been made to educate parents as to their proper placement and use.

In the area of driver behavior, The National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration (NHTSA) has done an outstanding job of public advocacy. In 2000, seat-belt use reached an all-time high of 73%, up from 50% in 1990. Due in no small part to congressional leadership regarding “.08” blood-alcohol-content and open container laws, alcohol-related traffic fatalities have declined from 57% of all traffic deaths in 1982 to 38% in 1999.

Saving lives by focusing on the roadway itself has received much less attention. While the relatively small “Highway-Rail Grade Crossing” and “Hazard Elimination” initiatives have targeted specific roadway safety hazards, the statistical data support a much more significant investment in roadway safety.

Particular focus on engineering and maintaining roadways to meet the needs of older drivers is essential to achieve the goal of significantly reducing fatalities. These efforts should be undertaken in addition to the fine work underway in the areas of driver behavior and automobile safety.

Over the next two decades, the population of older drivers – those over 65 years of age – will increase dramatically (See Figure 1). This age group is highly “at risk” with injuries and fatalities far exceeding rates typical of the general population. Numerous studies confirm that older drivers are driving more and to a later age than ever before. It is projected that by the year 2020, nearly one in five motorists will fall into this age group. It is clear, from these demographic trends, that if we do not take action to create a safer roadway environment for older drivers, more people will die on our roadways.

Recent data demonstrates a disturbing trend in regard to the impact of the roadway
environment on emergency response personnel. More police officers die on our roadways than are killed by criminal's bullets. Firefighters and rescue workers are often delayed by congestion, the lack of clear signage and directional guidance, and clearly marked emergency access lanes.

We have the tools to significantly reduce both injuries and fatalities on our roadways. Numerous research studies have demonstrated that “positive guidance” in the form of wider and brighter roadway markings and more visible directional signage save lives. Rumble strips keep motorists from running off the road, and modern guardrail saves lives on those occasions when the motorist does leave the roadway. Studies have shown that a well designed, installed and maintained work zone with highly reflective markings reduces travel delays and crashes. In addition, visible police presence in work zones causes motorists to drive more slowly and carefully, and results in fewer injuries and fatalities to both workers and motorists.

The reauthorization of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) provides us with the opportunity to put what we know into practice and save lives and reduce injuries on our roadways. The Roadway Safety Program, proposed at $3 billion annually and funded by newly identified sources of revenue, can significantly reduce the carnage on our roadways.

While the human cost of motor vehicle crashes in pain, suffering and personal loss is incalculable, the economic cost has been estimated at $150 billion annually. The public cost to the U.S. taxpayer is a staggering $13.8 billion a year, equating to an added tax burden of $144 for every U.S. household. The roadway safety improvements included in ATSSA's proposal all have a cost-benefit ratio of at least 3 to 1, according to FHWA statistics.

The increased investment called for in the proposed Roadway Safety Program will also provide a direct stimulus to the U.S. economy. Each $1 billion spent for highway construction generates 42,100 jobs annually, based on a recent U.S. Department of Transportation study. Using this DOT figure, the Roadway Safety Program alone would generate over 300,000 new jobs over the course of a six-year bill.

Additionally, the U.S. DOT study states that every dollar invested in the nation's highway system yields $5.70 in economic benefits because of reduced delays, improved safety, and reduced vehicle maintenance costs. The Roadway Safety Program's new funding mechanism would therefore produce an estimated $172 billion in economic benefits over the same six year period. These economic benefits are in addition to the primary objectives of saving lives and reducing crashes, and the distinct financial benefits that would result from achieving those goals.

It is our hope that the Congress and the Administration will give serious consideration to our recommendations. Thousands of American lives depend on it.
Executive Summary

Each year in the U.S. nearly 42,000 people die and 3,000,000 are injured in motor vehicle crashes. These crashes result in an increased tax burden of $144.00 for each U.S. household and a societal cost of $580 for every person living in the U.S. Older drivers are at a much higher risk of dying in a motor vehicle crash than any age category but the youngest drivers. The retiring “baby boom” generation will result in 1 in 5 drivers aged 60 or older by 2020.

Efforts to modify driver behavior and improve the structural safety of motor vehicles is at an all time high. In 2000, seat-belt use reached a record of 73%. Alcohol-related traffic fatalities have declined from 57% in 1982 to 38% in 1999. Air bags and anti-lock brakes are becoming increasingly standard.

The Federal government has often served as a leader when it comes to improving the safety components of our nation’s roadways. The 1966 and 1973 Highway Safety Acts were major catalysts towards upgrading guardrail, pavement markings and road signs. The creation of the Hazard Elimination Program (Section 152) and Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Program (Section 130) have targeted monies to reduce some of our nation’s most dangerous road sections.

These roadway safety infrastructure initiatives provided states and localities the incentives they needed to upgrade their safety infrastructure and in turn saved the federal and state governments billions of dollars through the reduction of crashes, especially on two-lane rural roads.

21st century roadway safety devices are capable of providing similar returns on investment for the taxpayer. Rumble strips, brighter pavement markings, larger and brighter signs, upgraded guardrails and guardrail endtreatments and numerous other roadway safety devices with cost benefit ratios of not less than 3 to 1 are available today for U.S. roadways. However, without national leadership, the utilization of these devices will remain as sporadic as the use of “no passing zone” pavement markings were in the 1960's.

The ATSSA proposed initiative calls for a $3 billion a year investment in our nation’s roadway safety infrastructure. Over the course of a six-year Federal Surface Transportation Program reauthorization bill, the program would add $17.8 billion in new funding for roadway safety, and $12.5 billion for all programs that currently benefit from the Highway Trust Fund.

According to U.S. DOT statistics this type of roadway investment would generate 300,000 new jobs and $172.71 billion in economic benefits. An additional economic benefit is received in reducing motor vehicle crashes and the expenses the federal, state and local governments incur.

ATSSA’s initiative seeks to make improvements by targeting high-risk demographics and locations through the greater use of low-cost roadway safety improvements. In addition ATSSA proposes improving the state of the practice in work zones and minimum specifications for roadway visibility.
If the average U.S. crash rate remains unchanged, one child of every 84 born today will die violently in a motor vehicle crash. Six out of every 10 children will be injured in a highway crash over a lifetime, many of them more than once.

Source: AASHTO Strategic Highway Safety Plan.
If the average U.S. crash rate remains unchanged, one child out of every 84 born today will die violently in a motor vehicle crash. Furthermore, 6 out of every 10 children will be injured in a highway crash over a lifetime, many of them more than once. 

This past year nearly 42,000 people lost their lives on our nation’s roadways. Another three million people were injured in motor vehicle crashes. While the human cost in pain, suffering and personal loss from these crashes is incalculable the economic impact to the U.S. is roughly $150 billion.

The financial impact from motor vehicle crashes is not confined to those directly involved. The cost to the U.S. taxpayer is a staggering $13.8 billion a year equating to an added tax burden of $144.00 for every U.S. household. In addition the societal costs related to motor vehicle crashes totals $580 for every person living in the U.S., or 2.2% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

In response to the personal, economic, and societal costs of 41,000-plus annual fatalities on U.S. roadways, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) established aggressive goals to reduce fatalities. FHWA set a goal of reducing fatalities and injuries 20% by 2008. AASHTO set a goal to reduce fatalities by 5,000 to 7,000 by 2005. ATSSA’s roadway safety proposals for the reauthorization of the federal surface transportation programs is designed to achieve these goals by providing a significantly increased investment in our roadway safety infrastructure.

More than 40% of all funds used to construct, repair and upgrade our nation’s roadways are provided by the federal government. Every time they go to the gas pump motorists pay 18.4 cents per gallon into a fund that was specifically created to support transportation improvements and maintenance. In 2002 the total funding available to states from this federal program is nearly $32 billion - a record level.

The last congressional action on funding roadway improvements is called the Transportation Equity Act of the 21st Century (TEA-21), enacted in 1997. What has been TEA-21’s impact on roadway safety? Each year since the passage of TEA-21 fatalities have risen, nearing 42,000 this past year. Work zone fatalities alone rose from 868 to 1,093 from 1999-2000.

How can this be? We have safer cars, more people using seat belts and fewer people drinking and driving. We have a record level of transportation funding, yet people keep dying. 

As ATSSA developed its policy on how to enhance TEA-21 to improve safety, it became clear that we as a nation need to develop a comprehensive policy that focuses sufficient resources to attack the problem. We took a hard look at where people are being injured and killed, and determined if there were improvements that could be made to the...
infrastructure, or possibly the state of the practice, that could bring these numbers down. As a result, ATSSA’s Roadway Safety Program focuses on creating a comprehensive roadway safety program.
Roadway Safety Program

The Need for Safer Roads

Roadway conditions contribute to nearly one-third of all motor vehicle fatalities.\(^2\)  Additionally, two-thirds of all fatalities occur on two-lane rural roads.\(^2\) Unfortunately, out of the $32 billion TEA-21 program, only $730 million yearly is directly targeted to making our roadways safer.

TEA-21 allows states to flex these dedicated safety dollars to other roadway programs. In addition, local political or budgetary tactics can actually reduce the amount spent on safety improvements. In Wisconsin, for example, a statewide interest group convinced the legislature to statutorily prohibit the use of federal roadway dollars on stand-alone safety projects such as better signage and pavement markings.\(^2\)

Federal, state and local transportation and census statistics indicate where crashes are occurring and project roadway safety trends. The following are areas that are targeted as part of ATSSA’s safety initiative:

- **Run-off-Road Crashes**: The Federal Highway Administration estimates that run-off-road crashes comprise about a third of all highway fatalities and cost our society about $80 billion a year.\(^2\)
  - Countermeasures such as rumble strips can help prevent drivers from leaving the roadway, as can better signage and markings, especially on rural roads. Modern guardrail can help save motorists lives when they do leave the roadway.

- **Intersection Safety**: Nearly 10,000 Americans lost their lives in intersection crashes in 1999.\(^2\) Each year there are more than 2.8 million intersection crashes (over 45% of all reported crashes). Roughly 1.5 million Americans are injured in intersection-related crashes each year.\(^2\) Older drivers are especially vulnerable at intersections as their line-of-sight is reduced and their reaction time is generally slower than that of younger drivers. FHWA’s report on older drivers showed that two key improvements – better lighting and improved pavement markings – become more important to drivers as they age.\(^2\)
  - Pedestrians & Bicyclists: During the last decade, more than 63,000 pedestrians died and more than a million others were injured in pedestrian-vehicle crashes.\(^\) Another 8,000 bicyclists died and 700,000 were injured in motor vehicle-related crashes in the past decade.\(^2\) Many of these bicycle fatalities involve children.\(^2\)
  - Older Drivers: In 1998 there were 7,269 people 65 years and older who died in motor vehicle crashes.\(^2\) People 65 years and older represented 13 percent of the population in 1998 and 18 percent of motor vehicle deaths. By 2020 it is projected that one in five drivers will be age 65 and over.\(^2\)


\(^{25}\) Ibid.


\(^{28}\) Ibid.


\(^{31}\) FHWA Guidelines and Recommendations to Accommodate Older Drivers and Pedestrians. October 2001. pg. 1.
make the roads safer for older drivers in FHWA’s excellent report, “Highway Design Handbook For Older Drivers and Pedestrians.”

**Speeding:** Traveling too fast for conditions or in excess of the posted speed limits is related to close to 1/3 of all fatal crashes and costs America approximately $27.7 billion dollars in economic costs each year. An FHWA report on a European safety scanning tour demonstrated that wider markings in the Netherlands resulted in the reduction of vehicle speeds by 10km/h and accidents by 35%32. The same study reported that experiments with variable speed limits resulted in a 25% to 50% reduction in accidents.33

We propose that considerable effort be spent on “speed management systems” that will slow drivers down close to the posted speed limit. This alone could result in saving a significant number of lives annually.

**Work Zones:** Work zone fatalities and injuries have steadily risen since the enactment of TEA-21. Fatalities rose from 868 in 1999 to 1,093 in 2000.34 As shown in Figure 2, they have risen four of the last five years.

In addition to the human cost of work zone crashes, the operation of our roadways is negatively impacted causing increased motor vehicle “greenhouse gas” emissions and increases the cost of moving truck freight and commuting times for workers. Better signage, markings, and the presence of uniformed police officers are among the tools that can reduce fatalities and injuries in work zones.

**Emergency Management Systems:** The terrorist attacks on the Pentagon across the Potomac from Washington, DC and New York City’s Twin Towers provided us with a stark reminder of the original purpose of our nation’s interstate highway system - National and Civil Defense. Both New York City and Washington, DC had a difficult time moving first responders in to deal with the tragedy and moving the public out of harms way.

The recently adopted FHWA Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices has an entire section on emergency management. However, the cost to cities and states in developing and implementing an emergency management plan will be significant.

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Recommendation: Create a New Roadway Safety Program (RSP)

A major component of ATSSA’s reauthorization proposal is the creation of a new core Roadway Safety Program (RSP) that would provide $3 billion a year for the installation of low-cost, high-benefit roadway safety improvements. Under the RSP funds would be available to make improvements that target the following high-risk areas:

- Run-off the road crashes;
- Intersections;
- Pedestrians/Bicycle;
- Older drivers;
- Speed management;
- Work zones;
- Safety management systems;
- Emergency management;
- Roadway safety research.

Run-Off-Road Mitigation: RSP funds would be available for states to install rumble strips, better wet-night pavement markings and improve signing. In addition, ATSSA calls for enacting a change that would require all pavement marking edge lines on federal-aid roads be not less than six inches in width. Currently 29 of the 50 states are using some forms of wider lines to assist motorist visibility. The cost-benefit ratio of pavement markings and rumble strips respectively has been documented as high as 60 to 1.

Intersections: As part of the RSP, funds would be available to install intersection safety countermeasures that enhance signing, markings, retiming of signals, and automated enforcement. ATSSA calls for RSP funds to also be spent to conduct studies designed at reviewing the effectiveness of automated enforcement technologies in reducing injuries and fatalities.

Pedestrians/Bicycle: Whether it is a school zone, a busy intersection in a downtown business section, or a bicyclist in a local neighborhood, numerous technologies are available to make pedestrian and bicycle transportation safer. RSP funds would be available to implement countermeasures such as auditory crosswalks and better signage and pavement markings.

Older Drivers: Older drivers have many special needs on the roadways. Signs and pavement markings need to be bigger and brighter to account for degrading eyesight.

State of the art guardrail and impact attenuators should be installed to create a more forgiving environment when motorists leave the roadway.

There are numerous structural changes that can be made to the roadway to expand the capacity of older drivers to drive safely. RSP funds are made available to states to implement countermeasures that create a more forgiving roadway for older drivers. ATSSA supports requiring that all installers of guardrail be trained to ensure that these vital roadway safety devices are installed correctly. In addition, our proposal calls for investing $3-$5 million a year in educating older drivers regarding how to safely navigate the roadways.

Additional RSP Eligible Older Driver Enhancement Activities:

- Safety countermeasures described in the FHWA publication: Guidelines and Recommendations to Accommodate Older Drivers and Pedestrians (FHWA-RD-01-051) (e.g. larger and brighter signs); Section 120(c) safety countermeasures; guide sign lighting retrieval systems; NCHRP 350 compliant guardrail, guardrail endtreatments, median barriers, bridge railings, barrier terminals, concrete barrier endtreatments, breakaway utility poles, crash cushions, impact attenuators, and permanent and temporary traffic control devices.
Speed Management: RSP funds could be used by states to evaluate variable speed limit technology, currently in use in Europe, for use on U.S. roadways.

Work Zone Safety: ATSSA’s work zone safety policy recommendations are designed to ensure that those who design, install and adjust traffic control work zones have the best training and expertise on how to do so safely and with minimum impact to the motoring public. We recommend requiring minimum levels of safety training for roadway workers and work zone device installers. In addition, we support increasing the size of work zone pavement markings to a minimum width of six inches and ensuring that traffic control devices consist of high performance reflective materials. In high-risk work zones, positive separation would be required and federal funds would be made available to ensure that police assistance is available during high-risk work zone operations.

In addition to policy changes that enhance the quality of roadway work zones we recommend that additional funding be made available for education and outreach programs to industry and the motoring public. We recommend that the RSP provide $500,000 a year to fund each of the following initiatives:

- The ATSSA-FHWA-AASHTO sponsored National Work Zone Awareness Week.
- The ARTBA/TTI National Work Zone Information Clearinghouse.
- The development of an FHWA conference on Work Zone Safety with the release of an FHWA Work Zone Safety and Mobility Report.

Safety Management Systems: RSP funds could be used by states to develop statewide safety management systems to ensure that roadway safety devices are installed and replaced in an efficient and timely manner.

Emergency Management: Under our proposal RSP funds are available to assist states in developing and implementing an emergency management system. The signage, changeable message signs and devices that are necessary for implementing such a program would be eligible for federal funding.

Roadway Safety Research – ATSSA proposes that RSP funds be used to double the roadway safety data analysis and evaluation programs ($25 million). It is vital that additional emphasis be placed on understanding the current conditions that cause roadway injuries and fatalities and the benefits of roadway safety systems.
Funding the Roadway Safety Program

ATSSA proposes that this new Roadway Safety Program be funded at $3 billion a year by utilizing the following new funding resources:
- Restore interest revenue to the Highway Trust Fund ($1.5 billion yr.)
- Transfer General Fund Ethanol Tax (2.5 cents) ($400 million yr.)
- Index federal motor fuels user fee to the CPI ($900 million yr.) Figure 3.

ATSSA proposes using this new revenue in a manner that supports the funding under the RSP and, as indicated in Figure 4, generate additional revenue for the Highway Trust Fund (HTF) for all transportation projects starting in year two. Over the course of a six-year reauthorization bill the HTF would receive an additional $12.5 billion while at the same time investing $17.8 billion to improve our nation’s roadway safety infrastructure.

The increased investment called for in the ATSSA roadway safety proposal provides direct stimulus to the U.S. economy. Each $1 billion spent for highway construction generates 42,100 jobs annually, based on a recent U.S. Department of Transporta-

39 Ibid.
Brightness and Visibility of Signage and Markings

The Need for Greater Visibility

In 1993 Congress required the Federal Highway Administration to develop and implement minimum levels of retro-reflectivity (brightness measurement) for pavement markings and signs. Driving at night or in adverse weather conditions increases the risk of roadway crashes.

According to various studies, drivers are approximately three times as likely to be involved in an accident during rainy or wet pavement conditions\footnote{Ibid.} and nearly five times as likely to be involved in a nighttime versus daytime crash.\footnote{Ibid. Page 7.}

Nighttime visibility is a problem for all drivers, but most especially older drivers. A healthy 20-year old with 20/20 vision will have, in effect, 20/40 vision at night.\footnote{Ibid.} However an older driver's visual acuity corrected to 20/20 with glasses drops to 20/70 or 20/80 in the dark.\footnote{Ibid.} A driver aged 60 needs approximately three times as much light on an object to see it as clearly as they did age 20.\footnote{Ibid.}

A further examination of statistical data demonstrates that older drivers are nearly four times as likely to be involved in a fatal crash when compared with drivers of all ages.\footnote{Ibid.} Accidents involving older drivers most frequently involve failure to heed signs, yield the right of way, or turn properly.\footnote{Ibid.}

Recommendation: Implement Minimum Levels of Retroreflectivity

ATSSA proposes that a minimum retroreflectivity standard for pavement markings and signs be established to ensure the necessary amount of light reflected back to the driver is sufficient to allow an older driver to navigate the roadway safely. ATSSA supports the timely publication of a final rule to establish minimum levels of retroreflectivity for signs and pavement markings as an essential component in reducing the number of fatalities on our nation's highways.

Under the ATSSA proposed Roadway Safety Program states and local governments could utilize RSP funds to bring their road systems in compliance with the newly established minimum levels of retroreflectivity.
The Need for Safer Hardware

Congress recognized the need for improving roadway safety hardware as part of the 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation and Efficiency Act (ISTEA). ISTEA mandated that the FHWA institute measures to enhance the crashworthy performance of roadside safety features. As early as 1994 the FHWA called for the replacement of old and obsolete roadway safety hardware such as blunt end guardrail terminals.51

In 1997 the FHWA released a guidance memorandum that strongly encouraged states to upgrade roadside safety hardware with devices that comply with National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) Report 350 (NCHRP 350).52

Recommendation: Fund the Upgrade of Roadside Safety Hardware to NCHRP Report 350 Standards

ATSSA supports the timely publication of a final rule to establish a schedule for the upgrading of all roadside safety hardware in compliance with National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) Report 350 guidelines. ATSSA proposes that the new Roadway Safety Program funding be provided to assist states in upgrading their road systems in compliance with NCHRP 350.
Conclusion

Approximately 3,500 people die every month on our nation’s roadways. The increased tax burden from these crashes for taxpayers is nearly $14 billion with societal costs well over $150 billion. ATSSA’s proposal to invest $3 billion a year to enhance the nation’s roadway safety infrastructure is a sound investment that will pay for itself in reduced crashes.

In addition, the funding mechanisms put in place to fund the Roadway Safety Program would provide much needed additional revenue to enhance the capacity of our nation’s transportation system. We look forward to taking these proposals to Congress and the American people to get their support for improving our roadway safety system and making “Safer Roads - Save Lives” a reality.
2. Ibid. (2000).