Remarks of Jacqueline Glassman
Acting Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
at the
Intelligent Transportation Systems' World Congress
San Francisco, California
November 8, 2005

Thank you, Mike, and good morning.

I want to welcome all of you to the United States and thank the ITS World Congress for bringing together in one place, once again, all of us involved in the next generation of surface transportation.

By bringing together the collective creativity and foresight of governments and industry working together we can ensure that as we build a more mobile society, we also make it a safer society.

I represent the agency in the United States primarily responsible for reducing death and injuries on the public roads. Since 2001, President Bush and Secretary Mineta have made safety the number one priority at the United States Department of Transportation. And we are seeing the results.

Here in the United States safety belt use just reached a record high and alcohol related deaths have decreased by more than 5% over the past 2 years. The motor vehicle fatality rate has reached a record low.

The President recently signed a new law that will provide additional safety infrastructure funding for states enacting primary enforcement safety belt laws, that will help reduce impaired driving, and that will enhance our ability to collect the kind of robust data we need to make informed policy choices.

Although we have made progress, we still have much work to do. Each year 1.2 million people around the world die in motor vehicle crashes. In America, motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for everyone under age 35, killing over 40,000 people in the U.S. every year.

At NHTSA, we continue to study the causes of these crashes and the countermeasures that may address them. We recently completed a naturalistic driving study. This study included over 100 drivers, all of whom agreed to be videotaped, while driving, over the span of a year.

This was the first instrumented vehicle study ever undertaken to collect pre-crash, naturalistic driving behavior. It is also the first study of its kind detailing information on a large number of near crash events.

We recorded over 2 million driving miles, almost 8300 incidents and close to 800 near crashes. For the first time, we've collected real time information on what is happening inside a vehicle in the seconds before a crash occurs.

What we saw is that, in nearly 80% of all the crashes in the study and 65% of all the near crashes, the drivers were paying no attention to driving during the 3 seconds just before the crash incident. The study confirmed that we need drivers to stay focused on driving.

ITS technologies can help us do just that. ITS technologies can also help compensate when drivers do not respond to imposing danger. Virtually every new light truck sold in the U.S. will soon include electronic stability control. This is a very important new technology that helps keep vehicles on the road.

At NHTSA, we think about electronic stability control much like we think about safety belts. Over the past decades, no technology, or device has had more impact on safety than the safety belt. We estimate that over 300,000 people in the United States have been saved as a result of safety technologies. We attribute a full 50% of those to the safety belt alone. As safety belt use has risen in the last few years, the fatality rate has declined.

Electronic stability control promises to be just as dramatic. Our studies suggest that stability control systems will reduce single vehicle crashes by substantial amounts -- 67% for light trucks and 35% for passenger cars. Since about a third of our motor vehicle fatalities in the United States involve rollovers and most of those are single vehicle crashes, this means that keeping the vehicles on the road and keeping them from rolling over can save thousands of lives a year.

We are also starting to see other advanced technologies in the marketplace. Lane departure warning and adaptive cruise control systems help alert drivers that they are drifting or getting too close to other vehicles. Braking assistance is another system that can help avoid or reduce the severity of a crash. These too will be saving lives.

In the United States, crashes involving rear-end collisions, road departures or lane change crashes account for 2.6 million crashes, and 27,000 deaths, each year.

Our naturalistic driving study has already shown us that, in those incidents, drivers not paying attention contributed to 93% of rear end striking collisions. And, in every crash in the study, the vehicle in front was actually stopped. This means that there could have been enough time to alert drivers or to have the vehicle step in to avoid the crash or reduce the impact.

Finding the links between real world incidents and the technologies we incorporate to help avoid them will help us remove motor vehicle crash as a major cause of death in the United States and worldwide.

As we move from the Intelligent Vehicle Initiative towards the next generation of ITS technologies, we will focus on integration. Integration of onboard systems and integration of vehicle and infrastructure based systems. There are 4 major initiatives that we are focusing on at NHTSA.

The Integrated Vehicle Based Safety Systems Initiative will help us understand how these various vehicle based crash avoidance technologies can best work together.

The Cooperative Intersection Collision Avoidance System project is focused on reducing the more than 9000 American lives lost each year in intersection crashes.

We are actively moving forward on the Next Generation of E911, to make sure that when crashes do occur, emergency responders can quickly find the crash site and determine what kind of medical services will be needed when they arrive.

We are actively engaged in rulemaking to standardize information to be collected by electronic data recorders because we believe that this data will serve as the foundation for a full system of Automatic Crash Notification in the future.

And, the Vehicle Infrastructure Integration program will continue to collect and study the data as we consider how best to employ both vehicle to vehicle communications and vehicle to infrastructure communication in the future.

As we can already see, we have the clear ability to make gains in mobility and productivity without sacrificing safety. As Secretary Mineta has said: "Morbidity and Mortality should not be the price of mobility."

We have the potential to design and develop a transportation system for the future that can do exactly what our recent naturalistic study shows to be necessary. We can help drivers remain focused on driving. We can alert them when they begin to stray. We can communicate relevant information to them, such as road conditions, changing traffic patterns and slowing traffic. We can help vehicles compensate for driver inattention and error.

In the process, we can build an Intelligent Transportation System devoid of the killer that takes 1.2 million people from us every year. There is no better mission for us to pursue than a safer world even as we strive for better mobility and productivity in our transportation system.

Thank you for your continued focus on safety and the advancement of our transportation system.