

Remarks by Bill Bronrott
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A funny thing happened on the way to NCSL this year. Ninety days ago, I stepped down from my seat in the Maryland General Assembly to step up to this great new adventure serving as Deputy Administrator of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

This is yet another in a continuing series of roles I've taken on at the federal, state and local levels over the past 30 years to reduce death and injury and costly crashes on our roadways – all in the spirit of a vision that I hope we all can share – healthy and safe communities where families are kept whole and scarring tragedies are averted.

Thank you for the invitation to participate in this “Trucking 101” and to brief you about FMCSA’s still-relatively-new role in coordinating our nation’s efforts on Commercial Motor Vehicle safety.

I’d like to talk with you about our mission, goals, and core principles, and give you a sense of some nuts and bolts functions that are for and about partnership with our stakeholders – first and foremost each and every state.

While I will miss the House of Delegates, I am delighted to be back at NCSL in this new capacity because I know that the President’s Number One transportation priority is safety and Transportation Secretary LaHood’s Number One priority is safety.

I also know that the President set aside party politics in choosing Ray LaHood as our nation's Transportation Secretary. They understand that dying on our highways is not a partisan experience. Your constituents – our constituents – deserve to arrive alive without it being or even feeling like death-defying acts.

The last time I was in Louisville was 1988 to attend the NTSB hearing that looked into the single worst drunk driving crash still in U.S. history up the road in Carrollton, Kentucky.

You may recall that a church bus filled mostly with children was struck by a drunk driver, resulting in 27 deaths and 34 injuries. In the aftermath of that crash came a renewed sense of urgency about impaired driving and the engineering of school buses. Over the years, we have seen how highway deaths drop when concerned citizens take a stand and government at all levels come together.

Clearly, there is much more we must do in partnership as evidenced by the fact that, last year alone, on average, 100 people were killed every day in traffic crashes – 1 out of 9 of them involving large trucks.

Taking swift action to move our states and nation Toward Zero Deaths is not just a slogan – it's not just about being socially responsible – it's also about being fiscally prudent.

In Maryland, I served on the House Appropriations Committee and its transportation subcommittee when we faced major shortfalls in our General Fund and Transportation Trust Fund. And, FMCSA Administrator Anne Ferro was a state motor vehicle administrator for many years. We know the fiscal pressures the states and you as budget leaders are under.

We also know that traffic crashes of all kinds are draining our economy, our budgets and taxpayer pocketbooks to the tune of \$230 billion every year. That represents over \$700 from every man, woman and child in this country year-in and year-out.

We can dramatically reduce this bleeding to our budgets and literally speaking to people on our roadways, and FMCSA is committed to do its part when it comes to truck and bus safety.

Federal Role

Eleven years ago, a Republican-majority Congress and a Democratic President acted together to pull the commercial vehicle safety functions out of the Federal Highway Administration to create a free-standing safety agency -- FMCSA – with a single mission – the safety of trucks and motor coaches, the safety of those behind the wheel, and those who share the road with them.

They set partisan politics aside in recognizing the need for a consistent set of rules of the road rather than a “patchwork quilt” of regulations and inconsistent driver and vehicle enforcement among the states that undermine public safety.

In carrying out this “safety first” mandate, our goals include:

- * Developing and enforcing data-driven motor carrier safety rules and regulations;
- * Harnessing safety IT systems to target higher risk carriers in enforcing safety regulations;
- * Targeting education messages to carriers, commercial drivers, and the public; and
- * Partnering with stakeholders, including Federal, State, and local enforcement agencies, the motor carrier industry, safety groups, and organized labor on efforts to reduce bus and truck-related crashes.

FMCSA Core Principles

In meeting the challenges of our safety mission, our strategic focus is shaped by three core principles:

- * One is to raise the safety bar to enter the motor carrier industry.
- * Two – To maintain high safety standards to remain in the industry.
- * And our third core principle is to remove high risk behaviors and operators from operating.

These three principles and our overall mission go hand in hand with US DOT's broader top priorities of:

- Safety
- A transportation system in a state of good repair;
- Economic competitiveness;
- Environmental sustainability; and
- Livable communities.

Field-Centric

In carrying out our mission, our core focus is the field. That's where you can find seven of ten FMCSA employees in every one of your states – out on the frontlines -- at the roadside -- alongside countless state and local law enforcement partners to advance our "safety first" vision.

These include our Field and Division Administrators, Safety Investigators, auditors, and inspectors. With major grants from Congress, we actively guide and train transportation and safety professionals in each state, including State Police, Departments of Transportation, and many other organizations to target unsafe commercial motor vehicle operations.

Every year, nearly 3.5 million standardized commercial vehicle inspections are conducted at the roadside and hundreds of thousands of unsafe trucks, buses and drivers are removed from our roads.

In FY 2009 alone, right here in Kentucky, state inspectors conducted nearly 88,000 roadside truck and bus inspection. I want to recognize Pamela Rice, FMCSA's Division Administrator in Kentucky for her superb work here in the bluegrass state.

On any given day, you will find people like Pam and our Safety Investigators working in the states on:

- Strikeforce crackdowns against illegal household goods carriers and unsafe hazmat carriers,
- Our Commercial Driver's Licensing program,
- Our border safety,
- Our medical program that is focused on the health and wellness of drivers,
- A new driver entrant safety assurance process, and
- Much more

Across the nation, FMCSA and state personnel screen every new interstate truck and bus company -- about 40,000 each year -- to ensure they have necessary safety management controls in place.

We work with states that investigate, collect, and report truck and bus crash data. We compile that data at the national level to target long-haul, regional, and local truck and bus companies with poor safety performances. These are companies that transport household goods, hazardous materials, standard freight, and passengers.

We work with the states to implement uniform driver's license standards ensuring that Commercial Motor Vehicle operators – no matter where they reside -- have the necessary skills to operate safely in any state.

In the spirit of our agency's first core principle – raising the safety bar to enter the motor carrier industry – FMCSA has taken numerous actions, such as strengthening the new entrant safety assurance program to identify start-up truck and bus companies' deficient in key areas.

We also have implemented a vetting program to weed out unsafe motor coach and household goods carriers who reincarnate to avoid sanctions. So far, we have weeded out about one-third of 2,600 applicants for passenger and household goods carrier operating authority. These applications have been dismissed, denied or withdrawn. We plan to expand this vetting program to hazmat carriers applying for authority.

MCSAP

In large part, the safety inspections and compliance reviews taking place in your states are made possible through a consolidated federal grant program called MCSAP – the Motor Carrier Safety Assistance Program.

In FY10, FMCSA's grants to states, local governments and others exceeded \$311 million. Over the span of the MCSAP program, we have seen inspections increase and deaths drop. Clearly, MCSAP works. And that's why we are pushing for even more in the future.

CSA 2010

But, to maintain high safety standards to remain in the industry, we are developing a major new centerpiece safety initiative that we will unveil later this year. It's called CSA 2010. CSA stands for Comprehensive Safety Analysis.

CSA will help us to more clearly determine motor carrier safety fitness and to better target enforcement efforts against unsafe operators. With significant input from state partners and other stakeholders, including nine listening sessions around the country, CSA is built on three components:

- * a new rating system based on a much more robust safety data system,
- * a new safety fitness rulemaking that provides greater flexibility in intervening with problem motor carriers, and
- * an enhanced intervention process with carriers showing performance problems – to accelerate corrections to those safety problems before crashes can occur.

Today, motor carrier safety fitness is based on a few generalized categories that don't give us as clear a picture as we will get under CSA, which will include seven specific high risk factors: unsafe driving; fatigued driving; driver fitness; crash history; vehicle maintenance; improper loading and cargo, and controlled substances and alcohol.

We have tested CSA in 9 states over a 30 month trial period: Colorado, Georgia, Missouri, New Jersey, Delaware, Kansas, Maryland, Minnesota and Montana. We found that we were able to conduct one-third more investigations with CSA in contrast to our current approach.

CSA is expected to go “live” in every state by the end of this year. At that time, roadside inspectors will be able use this more robust measurement system to identify carriers for inspection and to intervene on safety deficiencies to prevent roadway tragedies from happening in the first place.

For more information about CSA 2010, I encourage you to go to our website:
www.fmcsa.dot.gov.

Rulemaking

Earlier I mentioned that our third core principle is to prevent high risk driving behaviors. One that I know you are dealing with back home is distracted driving. It’s a growing nationwide concern – for good reason. In just 2008, nearly 6,000 people died in crashes involving a distracted driver and more than half a million were injured.

One of the more compelling studies – by the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute – found that texting drivers take their eyes off the road for an average of 4.6 seconds out of every six seconds while they are texting. Now, imagine a large truck or bus barreling down the highway at 55 miles per hour. 4.6 seconds of looking away is the equivalent to the length of a football field.

No wonder that texting drivers are more than 20 times more likely to get in a crash than drivers who don’t text. Pretty compelling. And very frightening.

That is why Transportation Secretary LaHood convened a two-day summit last fall on distracted driving and texting.

His relentless pursuit of texting bans, the media's heightened interest in this highway safety story of the year, and leadership among a growing number of Governors and state legislators, have resulted in a groundswell of support for state level texting bans covering all drivers. To date, 31 states, DC and Guam have taken this action.

Working with Secretary LaHood, FMCSA issued a proposed rule last fall to prohibit commercial interstate truck and bus drivers from texting while driving. Our final rule is expected this fall. We are also looking at a proposed rule by the end of this year to ban cell phone use by commercial motor vehicle operators.

By the way, Secretary LaHood is planning a second summit on distracted driving this fall. So, stay tuned for that.

Reauthorization Outlook

Looking ahead to the reauthorization of the multi-year, multi-billion dollar federal surface transportation program, we believe that our future resources must keep the focus on assisting states to achieve the highest level of commercial vehicle safety enforcement.

Over the past year, the Secretary has held listening sessions across the country to thoughtfully plan for the long-term needs of our nation's roads, bridges, public transit systems and safety programs.

All DOT modal administrators attended the sessions and have talked to countless government officials, industry, safety groups, and interested citizens at each location. FMCSA Administrator Ferro participated in the Minnesota session in February, and I attended the North Dakota forum last month that focused on rural transportation.

The final leg of the listening tour recently took place. The entire Department is eager to review all the feedback so we can move forward with a reauthorization bill that best addresses the needs of our entire surface transportation system and those of the states and regions across our nation.

State Partnership

You know, there probably wasn't a greater states' rights champion than President Reagan. But he acknowledged that when it came to highway safety, "This problem is bigger than the individual states. It's a truly national problem, and it touches all our lives."

I think that's true. Highway and vehicle safety really have nothing to do with party politics or geographic boundaries. When it comes to arriving alive, your constituents – our constituents – don't care about party affiliation or who is federal, who is state. They just want us to get the job done.

Let me pause at this time to recognize an outstanding young man who you should get to know and someone you can call upon with any questions. He is our agency's director of government affairs – Mr. Curtis Johnson.

As FMCSA looks ahead to its future safety challenges and opportunities – whether it's with the surface transportation reauthorization bill, upcoming safety rulemakings, or roadside enforcement programs, we know – and we know that you know – that Washington doesn't have all the answers. I can tell you that 90 days in to this – even after 12 years in the Maryland General Assembly and 30 years working on highway safety – goodness knows that I'm still learning!

I have used the word “partnership” a lot this morning. I’ve done so for a reason: We want your consultation and collaboration as we carry out our congressionally-mandated “safety first” mission.

Conclusion

I want to thank you on behalf of FMCSA’s dedicated workforce – 7 of 10 of whom are on the frontlines in your states. Thank you for this opportunity to come back to NCSL to discuss “Trucking 101.” And thank you for your public service and all of your personal sacrifices that I know you make in your service to your states and communities.

Let us work together as if lives depend on it – because they do.

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