

FEDERAL SAFETY LEGISLATION

by

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I know you will appreciate the difficulties in reporting Federal developments in highway safety when these developments are occurring so rapidly, and considering the necessary lead time in the preparation of this report.

My formal statement will thus be descriptive of the situation as it existed when these remarks were composed --- about one week ago. I shall then report any significant subsequent developments during the discussion period.

As you know, the President on September 9 signed two bills into law. These laws, to be administered by the Department of Commerce initially, and by the Department of Transportation when established, are: First: The Highway Safety Act of 1966, which supports a greatly expanded highway safety program by States and their political sub-divisions in activities such as driver education, training and licensing, enforcement and accident investigation, highway standards, emergency medical care and transportation of the injured. Second: The National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966, which has as its major objective assurance to the public of improved safety performance of the motor vehicles and related component equipment such as tires and brakes which are purchased in interstate commerce.

Alan S. Boyd, Under Secretary for Transportation, in a statement before the Senate appropriations committee October 5 summarized the objectives of the new broad-gauged attack on highway accidents very succinctly:

- a reduction in the number of occurrences of traffic accidents.
- the increased survivability of victims of traffic accident crashes with minimization of the severity of injuries.
- the improvement in emergency medical care and transportation of the injured to increase the chances of an accident victim's opportunity to recover fully from his injuries.

To achieve the stated objectives programs are being initiated in five general areas:

Motor Vehicles Safety Performance Standards

The law requires that initial motor vehicle standards, based on existing standards, be issued on or before January 31, 1967. On October 8 the Secretary of Commerce made public a series of proposals to be considered in establishing such interim standards, and invited comment from interested parties. New and revised motor vehicle standards are to be developed and issued on or before January 31, 1968.

It is recognized that any standards will still have to be based largely on a careful, detailed analysis of what is already known about the safety performance of vehicles. This is true simply because only limited research can be completed in the available time. Solid research of the complexity required needs years for real accomplishment. Concurrently with the interim effort, however, research programs of a scale that will produce needed information on which to base subsequent revisions or totally new standards will be initiated. Much of this research will center on detailed field investigation of accidents, including careful examination of injury patterns in relation to vehicular damage produced in the crashes.

Tire Safety Standards

The law specifically singles out this item of motor vehicle equipment with a separate authorization for establishing its safety performance standards. In addition, the law directs the Secretary to prescribe a uniform quality grading system and labeling system for tires, in order to assist the consumer to make an informed choice in the purchase of tires.

Research and Test Facility Study

The Federal Government presently has very limited research and test facilities to meet responsibilities which must be assumed under the new legislation, both with regard to the motor vehicle and tire safety standards work which I have just discussed as well as in regard to the development of the technical content of workable State safety programs that I shall presently describe.

The law accordingly requires the Secretary, first, to make a complete investigation and study of the need for a facility or facilities to conduct research, development, and testing in traffic safety and, second, to report his findings to Congress not later than December 31, 1967.

Traffic Safety Research and Development

Performance standards for State and community safety programs, a matter of primary concern to this group, must be based upon carefully documented scientific evidence, and provisions for measuring their impact, favorable or otherwise.

The primary immediate objective of this program is, therefore to generate sound, scientifically-obtained evidence and knowledge on which to base performance standards for State and community safety programs, and to develop sound cost/effectiveness comparisons among alternative practices in traffic safety. Many important aspects of State and community safety activities can be established reliably only upon completion of more comprehensive research, but the urgent need for action will not permit the luxury of unduly long waiting periods.

Traffic safety manpower is in critically short supply. This includes both research manpower and personnel for State and community safety programs, the latter including professionals for program management as well as technicians and service personnel. Immediate programs will be designed to produce more nearly adequate supplies of all of these types of manpower. But the primary effort in the first year, it has been decided, will be directed toward technician and management personnel rather than researchers.

A major item will be alcohol-safety research. The role of alcohol in the traffic accidents picture is such that the Congress has specifically inserted in the law that a report to the Congress on the subject be submitted by July 1, 1967. A major effort will accordingly be started immediately.

Another important aspect of the Federal program will be demonstration projects that focus on the translation into practice of research and newly discovered techniques.

One of the major projects is already underway in North Carolina. It deals with emergency medical care and transportation of the injured, and such closely related aspects of the post-accident response as the investigation and documentation of the crash, removal of debris, and the restoration of normal traffic flow. Under the announced plan, the latest techniques available for high-speed evacuation and treatment of the wounded will be explored in the handling of traffic casualties.

State and Community Safety Programs

The law requires that each State have a highway safety program under the administration of its Governor and approved by the Secretary. Such programs must be in accordance with uniform standards promulgated by the Secretary and expressed in terms of performance criteria for a number of program areas such as . . . driver education . . . driver testing and licensing . . . effective accident record system . . . accident investigations . . . vehicle registration . . . operation . . . inspection . . . highway design and maintenance (including lighting, markings, and surface treatment) . . . traffic control . . . vehicle codes and laws . . . and emergency services.

The law authorizes funds for matching grants to the States and, through the States to local communities to assist in the implementation of approved statewide programs.

Many States may have to overcome substantial budgetary and administrative limitations, shortages in trained personnel, and other problems in initiating the projected expansion of their highway safety activity. In many cases, new State legislation may be required either to provide the needed matching funds or to meet program standards established by the Secretary.

Maximum flexibility will accordingly be allowed each State in the development of its comprehensive program, within the broad guidelines established by the Secretary. However, the program of every State will be required to meet defined levels of performance that the Secretary will specify. The Secretary will waive these minimum standards where special local conditions warrant such actions. An important consideration in granting these waivers will be evidence that a reasonable effort directed toward achievement of the minimum standard is well under way.

I know you will be interested in the organization plan for carrying out programs in the five general areas I have just described.

A single agency will have the authority and the responsibility for carrying out provisions of both of the new safety laws.

It will be directed by an Administrator, appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate. The President has nominated and the Senate has confirmed, Dr. William Haddon, Jr. as Administrator. The Administrator will be assisted by a Deputy Administrator and a supporting staff of scientific, technical and administrative specialists.

The principal sub-units have been specified for major operating units and for the Administrator's technical and administrative staff. Each sub-unit will focus on one or more major aspects of the national traffic safety program. Together, these sub-units will constitute a coherent organization designed to meet the complex traffic safety program requirements mandated by the Congress in response to the President's request.

Some aspects of the program are of substantially greater urgency than others, and accordingly require that the associated organizational sub-units be placed in operation more quickly than the others. The urgency stems both from the provisions of the law for specified actions by specified dates and from the mounting casualty totals.

The overall organization plan, accordingly, is to staff completely the highest priority organizational sub-units as quickly as possible. The other principal organizational sub-units will be started on a skeletal basis, in some cases with only a director and a secretary, to prepare detailed plans for phasing into full-scale operations in fiscal years 1968 and 1969. Thus, the approach will be initiated in its entirety immediately, following a comprehensive master plan tailored to meet both the immediate and long-range objectives of the legislation.

Under the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966, the Secretary is to establish a National Motor Vehicle Safety Advisory committee, with a majority of members from the public and the others from industry; the Secretary is required to consult this committee in prescribing vehicle standards.

The Highway Safety Act of 1966 establishes a National Highway Safety Advisory committee, composed of the Secretary or his designate as chairman, the Federal Highway Administrator, and 29 members appointed by the President. Of the 29, four may be Federal officials, and the remainder must be selected from representatives of State and local governments and public and private interests and experts in the field.

As I am sure you know, on October 16 the President signed into law the Department of Transportation Act, creating a new cabinet level Department of Transportation to assure coordinated, effective administration of the transportation programs of the Federal Government; to facilitate the development and improvement of coordinated transportation service, to be provided by private enterprise to the maximum extent feasible; to encourage cooperation of Federal, State, and local governments, carriers, labor, and other interested parties toward the achievement of national transportation objectives; to stimulate technological advances in transportation; to provide general leadership in the identification and solution of transportation problems; and to develop and recommend to the President and the Congress for approval national transportation policies and programs, to accomplish these objectives with full and appropriate consideration of the needs of the public, users, carriers, industry, labor, and the national defense.

This Act shall take effect ninety days after the Secretary first takes office, or on such prior date after enactment of this Act as the President shall prescribe and publish in the Federal Register.

Under Secretary of Commerce for Transportation, Alan S. Boyd, has been named by the President to head this important new cabinet post.

I hope you will agree with me that the developments I have outlined today herald a new era in highway safety in the United States, and present a challenge and unprecedented opportunities to all of us who work at national, State, and local levels both in government and in the private sector.