

June 14, 2004

The Honorable Tom DeLay
Majority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
242 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative DeLay:

Last October, the undersigned organizations, representing the key agencies involved in safety at the state level, united to form the State Highway Safety Alliance. At that time, we apprised you of the major safety concerns and principles that should be addressed in a six-year surface transportation reauthorization bill. We applaud the fact that both the House and Senate have enacted provisions that help advance the cause of highway safety.

Now that the House and Senate bills are in conference, we wish to update you on our jointly held positions and urge you to consider the following

Increase Safety Funding and Overall Funding

The State Highway Safety Alliance supports the \$318 billion level of funding for a six-year reauthorization bill. In 2003, motor vehicle fatalities increased to more than 43,000 persons. Significantly increased federal safety funding must be authorized to enable the states to reverse this troubling statistic. Increased funding for the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) and for the grant programs those agencies administer would enable states to improve the safety of our roadways, address hazardous driving behavior, and ensure that unsafe commercial motor vehicles are taken off the road.

Support Key Safety Programs

The Alliance supports elevating safety to a core highway program status, increasing safety funding under this program, and adding a requirement for a statewide comprehensive highway safety plan. This new core program will enable state and local governments to implement safety infrastructure improvements that will decrease the deaths on our roadways. The comprehensive safety planning requirements will encourage greater coordination among various federally-funded safety as well as state and local safety programs and will ensure that the federal funds are used in a strategic, targeted manner.

Given the importance of safe transportation for children to school and construction work zone safety, we welcome the chance to work with you on differences in the bills.

We also support occupant protection incentives but urge that the incentives benefit states that have already enacted primary safety belt laws in an equal manner with those that will enact such laws. We recommend that the eligibility criteria in the House and Senate impaired driving incentive grant programs be combined to maximize flexibility while enhancing state impaired driving efforts.

The Alliance also supports the creation of a new Unified Carrier Registration System (UCR) for commercial motor carriers. The system would modernize and simplify the insurance and safety process for all motor carriers and ensure that states continue to receive adequate revenue for the purposes of motor carrier safety enforcement, with the flexibility to use these revenues as matching funds for state motor carrier safety assistance grants.

Fund Information System Improvements

The State Highway Safety Alliance strongly supports the funding for an incentive grant program for improvements to state information systems. These systems provide the infrastructure – the backbone – of every state’s safety planning and analysis processes. States need to enhance their safety information systems so that the information is in electronic form and is accessible, accurate, timely and linked together.

We also support the partial funding of the Transportation Safety Information Management System (TSIMS) that is to be matched by state contributions. TSIMS will function as a safety data warehouse and analytical system and will work in conjunction with other improvements made by states through the data incentive grant program. Both TSIMS and the state data improvement grant program are needed to support effective comprehensive safety plans.

In addition, the Alliance supports the funding of a program that allows states to modernize the commercial driver's license information system (CDLIS). CDLIS is a critical tool states use to keep unsafe commercial drivers off the road by ensuring they cannot hide their bad driving history or obtain a counterfeit or fraudulent license. Funds are needed to modernize CDLIS’ hardware and software to fix its current problems, improve its system security, and permit it to grow and evolve easily as volume grows and requirements change. Funds are also needed to allow the Secretary to evaluate a pilot program for sharing electronic information about all drivers' licenses -- both commercial and non-commercial – among states.

Further, the Alliance supports funding to link federal motor carrier safety information systems with state commercial vehicle registration and licensing systems (PRISM) and funding for the deployment of intelligent transportation system applications for commercial motor vehicle operation, driver and carrier information systems (CVISN).

Increase Investment in Safety Research

The Alliance believes it is essential that the FHWA, FMCSA, and NHTSA surface transportation safety research programs, the University Transportation Centers research program, the Local Transportation Assistance Program (LTAP) and the new Future Strategic Highway Research Program (FSHRP) receive funding that is at least commensurate with the overall increase in highway program funding. Additional research is needed to enhance the understanding of the causes of motor vehicle crashes and the effectiveness of various highway safety countermeasures.

Maintain Existing Safety Regulations

The State Highway Safety Alliance strongly believes that existing regulations promulgated by various DOT modal agencies should not be eroded or weakened in the reauthorization bill. For example, exemptions from driver hours-of-service regulations for the utility industry set a terrible precedent, undermine the effectiveness of the regulations, and harm the safety of drivers and other road users.

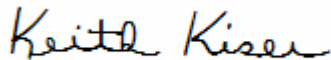
Choose Incentives Over New Sanctions and Penalties

The Alliance believes that incentives are preferable to sanctions and penalties. Incentives give states the flexibility and resources to find creative, results-oriented solutions that meet safety goals and fit state and local needs.

We oppose the imposition of new sanctions and penalties including turning open container penalties into sanctions, adding a new sanction for states that fail to develop and implement the requisite comprehensive statewide highway safety plan within a specified period, and adding a new penalty for states that do not enact legislation effecting first time drunk driving offenders with high blood alcohol concentrations.

We look forward to working with you and your staff to ensure the enactment of a well-funded, six -year reauthorization measure, and we welcome the opportunity to provide whatever information or assistance you may need. Thank you for considering our views regarding the most advantageous ways to enhance safety in this nation.

Sincerely,



Keith Kiser, Chair
American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA) Board of Directors



John Njord, President
American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO)



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