

Remarks of  
Nicole R. Nason  
Administrator  
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration  
United States of America

at the

140<sup>th</sup> Session of the  
United Nations' World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Registration (WP.29)  
Geneva, Switzerland  
November 15, 2006

Thank you Mr. Chairman

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, and colleagues,

It is my pleasure to be here with you at this Session of WP.29. I bring you greetings from Mary Peters, who has recently been sworn in as our Secretary of Transportation.

I grew up in New York, the daughter of a motorcycle policeman. My father was the head of the Highway Patrol and he later became the chief of police. I can vividly remember when he was seriously injured on his motorcycle, and I know a helmet saved his life. Being the daughter of a highway patrol officer gave me a unique perspective and taught me valuable lessons that I now teach my own two daughters.

Vehicle safety has been a part of my life for a long time. This gives me added appreciation for the work you do, the work we all need to do to improve vehicle safety worldwide.

One of the major concerns of the U.S. Department of Transportation is the burden that traffic crashes pose in terms of human and economic losses on the American people. Over 40,000 people die on our roads each year (43,443 in 20005). The situation is just as serious on the global scale--- about 40,000 in Europe, over 100,000 in China and over 90,000 in India. Overall, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that more than one million people die and 2 million are injured in traffic crashes worldwide and the global annual economic cost of road crashes is nearly \$600 billion.

The motor vehicle industry is a global industry. Consumers in the United States can now choose among new vehicles produced in North America, Europe, or Asia. We also expect that producers that do not currently sell in the United States will begin doing so over the next several years. The same thing is true for parts suppliers, with North American, European, and Asian companies supplying original equipment to the vehicles sold in all countries.

Since we have a global safety problem associated with a global industry, we need a global solution. This body, WP.29, has stepped forward to take on this global role. I congratulate you for your contributions in helping to transform WP.29 into a true World Forum for the Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations.

At this meeting of WP.29, we are on the verge of having another global safety regulation and two more environmental ones under the 1998 Agreement. And while having only a few GTRs is insufficient to satisfy skeptics, the process of establishing each one adds to our pool of knowledge on how to better implement the 1998 Agreement.

The first safety GTR on door locks was a test case. It taught us how to work together and highlighted the difficulties we will face with every GTR. The motorcycle GTR, soon to be our second safety GTR, demonstrated our commitment to taking a science-based, data driven approach. In developing this regulation, we did not assume that the mere existence of a requirement was sufficient justification for including it in the GTR. Instead, we conducted the necessary research and evaluations to demonstrate the need for, and appropriateness of, each requirement we decided to include.

I applaud you for making the difficult choices. I want to especially thank our Canadian colleagues for sponsoring the motorcycle GTR effort, the other Contracting Parties that played integral roles, the motorcycle industry for all its hard work and commitment, and the Chairs of GRRF and AC.3 for making it all come together.

Mr. Chairman, it's my pleasure and honor today to announce the U.S.' intention to cast a positive vote for this second safety GTR.

We must continue this momentum toward effective global harmonization. We must focus on the lessons learned from successful and not so successful efforts to develop GTRs, reassess our program of work on a regular basis, stop work on GTRs that are resource intensive with no chance of success or no safety benefits, and move on to challenges with greater benefits.

And on the subject of greater benefits, we believe we now have a unique and major opportunity to deliver on the full promise of the 1998 Agreement. Coming to agreement on the common wording of regulations saves money; that's vitally important for manufacturers and consumers. But we have the chance, right now, to save lives on an almost unprecedented scale on highways around the world.

I am talking about electronic stability control (ESC). We believe that ESC is the greatest life saving technology since the safety belt. ESC works to reduce deadly single vehicle crashes. It does so by assisting drivers in maintaining control of their vehicles and keeping them in lane and on the road.

Researchers around the world, in Europe, Japan and the United States, have studied the actual experience of different vehicle populations in different driving environments and yet come to remarkably similar conclusions about the high level of ESC effectiveness in the real world. This unusually strong body of supporting research led us in the U.S. to issue a proposal this past

September to require the installation of ESC as standard equipment in all new light vehicles in the U.S. by the 2012 model year. Our engineers and economists tentatively concluded that ESC in the U.S. reduces single-vehicle crashes of passenger cars by 34 percent and single vehicle crashes of sport utility vehicles by 59 percent.

As responsible regulators, we must move forward thoughtfully, but we also must do so promptly. You are all familiar with the expression time is money. We know that in the area of vehicle safety, time is also lives. This is particularly true for a high benefit technology like ESC. The faster we act, the more lives we can save.

NHTSA estimates that ESC would save 5,300 to 10,300 lives and prevent 168,000 to 252,000 injuries in all types of crashes annually if all light vehicles on U.S. roads were equipped with ESC systems.

Now, having said this, I appreciate this technology is costly. While I believe that some countries will find ESC to be the right answer right now, I understand that others may have other safety priorities that need to be addressed first.

Nevertheless, moving ahead now with a GTR on ESC will not only contribute to saving lives, but also, by establishing common requirements and helping to increase demand for ESC, it will promote additional product improvements and cost reductions. Accordingly, the U.S. plans to submit a proposal for a GTR on ESC. I strongly urge WP.29 to make ESC a top priority.

I also urge that as we move forward in developing all new GTRs, we keep in mind that while quantity is important, quality is even more so. We want quality regulations, whether it is ESC or anything else. As good policy makers, we owe it to each other and to our citizens to address safety problems in a way that is rational and justified, taking into consideration the relevant research and the economic well being of all of our societies.

This involves employing a common set of principles that call for measures such as using data and analysis to carefully select worthwhile projects, compare alternatives, and develop streamlined and effective regulations. I certainly understand the desire for speedy delivery, but I urge you to find the right balance.

The United States and all of us here are committed to the 1998 Agreement process. The lives of all of our citizens depend on our success.

So, again, I commend you for your excellent work and I thank you for this opportunity to address you today.

Thank you Mr. Chairman