NHTSA Research Public Meeting

Closing Remarks | James Owens, Acting Administrator

Thursday, November 21, 2019 | Washington, DC

Good morning everyone! It's been a great couple of days here at NHTSA. We're so glad that you could join us for our Research Public Meeting. And a special thanks to those of you who were able to join me yesterday morning.

Hopefully, as a result of these discussions, you have a better understanding of the many different research activities that NHTSA is leading to improve motor vehicle safety. And since next year is NHTSA's 50th Anniversary, I'll pull from one of our vintage TV ads and say that "we can all learn a lot of our dummies." Thank you all for joining us, and I hope you've found these sessions helpful.

I also want to remind you that we have a docket open for this event (NHTSA-2019-0083) and encourage you to submit comments and suggestions. We use your feedback as an important tool for aligning our research in the most impactful way.

This research has the potential to save lives – and there's nothing more important than that to every one of us at NHTSA. In 2018, we lost 36,560 lives on our nation's roadways. While that number was down 2.4 percent from 2017, that's no solace to the family and friends of those lost in senseless, preventable crashes.

Safety is our focus, our lifeblood, our mission. I hope it is yours as well.

NHTSA is engaged in numerous initiatives and areas of research that will drive safety improvements and advance deployment of new safety technologies. We are also conducting important behavioral research to help make us all better, more attentive, and more responsible drivers.

For example: Yesterday morning, you heard about our research supporting the deployment of Advanced Driver Assistance Systems, or ADAS, that can help drivers avoid or mitigate collisions.

In addition to the promise of future automated driving systems, we think active safety systems on the market today have tremendous potential to improve safety now—and we are continuing research in this area to help enhance performance and expand deployment.

In fact, I am pleased to announce that NHTSA has developed nine new draft test procedures for ADAS technologies, and these have been published in the Federal Register under docket NHTSA-2019-0102 for your feedback. We are seeking comments on these procedures and hope you will consider responding—your feedback is critical to help ensure such procedures appropriately test real-world performance, that they are fair, and that they can be carried out efficiently and effectively.

In the area of occupant protection, we recognize that vehicles with automated driving systems may employ novel seating arrangements. As you heard this morning, we are engaged in research to develop the necessary tools and test procedures for assessing the safety performance of occupant protection systems for the varied seating arrangements made possible with ADS vehicles.

While we continue to research ways to ensure occupant protection for advanced vehicles, we are also enhancing our ability to accurately test crashworthiness of today's vehicles.

You heard this morning about our work on a new THOR crash test dummy, which will help to more accurately represent crash behavior and injury risk, and improve the development of vehicles with enhanced occupant protection.

You also learned more about our work related to vulnerable road users, including our research on pedestrian crashworthiness protection; pedestrian crash avoidance technologies; and pedestrian distraction.

This is impactful research because, in 2018, close to half of motor vehicle fatalities involved pedestrians, bicyclists, older and child occupants, and motorcyclists.

NHTSA recently announced major upgrades to our New Car Assessment Program – the 5-Star Safety Ratings system for new vehicles. As part of these NCAP upgrades, NHTSA will consider adding new technologies tied to the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists, among other vulnerable road users. We will be inviting public comment on these proposed changes next year.

One area of particular interest to us is cybersecurity. NHTSA continues its research into identifying cyber risks, protecting cyber-physical assets; and methods for effective and efficient recovery from cyber incidents if and when they occur. We plan to update our Vehicle Cybersecurity Best Practices within the next year, and we will continue to work with stakeholders as we move forward.

I also should mention that USDOT will be participating in CyberStorm 2020, and I encourage you to sign up if your organizations haven't already committed to this important exercise. I want to thank those stakeholders here today who are members of the AutoISAC. Communication and collaboration are key to preventing cyber incidents that pose a risk to public safety.

Cybersecurity will underpin our progress toward connected vehicles. You just heard about several of the USDOT's multi-modal efforts on V2X, which we believe have significant safety and mobility potential.

Under the leadership of Secretary Chao, the Department of Transportation strongly supports reserving the 5.9 GHz Safety Band for transportation safety. Of course, the best way to protect the Safety Band for transportation applications is to use it—and to spread the word that this spectrum is not sitting idle, ready for the taking.

The depth and breadth of the research includes persistent behavioral issues such as speeding, alcohol-impaired driving, distraction, seat belt usage, as well as the growing impact that drug-impaired driving has on public safety.

We, meaning the folks in this room, have a huge opportunity to change the status quo: to make our roads safer than ever. Together, we can save lives and change the way Americans live, work, and travel.

I want to thank you again for your participation in this event, and I hope you will continue these conversations in the coming days, weeks and months.