

Tribal Traffic Safety Event Opening Remarks

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Virtual

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Good morning, and thank you so much for joining us today to discuss a critical issue – saving lives in tribal communities. I also want to thank our esteemed tribal leaders, Deputy Assistant Secretary Teller, and USDOT Tribal Affairs Director Booth for their time.

We are gathered today, during National Native American Heritage Month, to acknowledge the rich culture and many contributions that Native American citizens have made to our great country. We can think of no better way to express our gratitude than to work collaboratively with our federal, tribal, state, and safety advocacy partners to address disparities in traffic safety.

Equity is one of the Biden-Harris Administration's priorities, and we are working across NHTSA to identify areas where we can do more to address inequalities. Over the next four years, you will see us committed to improving safety for all road users – not just drivers and passengers but pedestrians, cyclists, children, older Americans, and people with disabilities – by taking a safe system approach.

The safe system approach is people-focused, meaning that infrastructure serves the needs of its users, not the other way around. A small example is ensuring that there are crosswalks at safe intervals to ensure that pedestrians can cross streets safely. A safe system approach incorporates the 5 Es: equity, engineering, education, enforcement, and emergency medical services. We must ensure everyone is working to make our transportation system safe for all its users.

NHTSA recently released our tenth edition of *Countermeasures That Work*, a resource to help all safety stakeholders address critical issues. This report supports a proactive, equitable safe system approach to eliminating fatalities on our nation's roads. It also addresses the safety of all road users, including those who walk, bike and drive. *Countermeasures That Work* provides strategies that can help prevent destructive behaviors like impaired driving, or encourage positive habits like wearing a seat belt. Please check it out if you haven't already – it's available on our website.

And as we continue to move forward on a safe system approach, we will not forget the voices of those who use the roads, particularly those in communities of color, underrepresented communities, and people with disabilities.

This is especially important, as Native Americans are killed in traffic crashes at rates higher than any other race or ethnicity. We also know that Native Americans are overrepresented in fatal pedestrian crashes. Some of this is due to what I mentioned earlier – a lack of infrastructure that takes into consideration the needs of pedestrians, along with dangerously high speeds and exceptionally busy roads.

Equity cannot be an afterthought – it needs to be considered and addressed throughout the process.

NHTSA respects tribal sovereignty and the government-to-government relationship we have with tribal nations. We will continue working with you to exchange information and expand access to resources, training, and technical assistance. We are here to support you.

NHTSA has funded numerous tribal safety programs that are addressing behavioral safety issues – and saving lives. The Rocky Boys Indian Reservation in Montana used NHTSA grant funds to promote youth safety by purchasing a driving simulator, which helps teenagers experience firsthand the dangers of driving impaired or distracted.

The Red Lake Nation of Minnesota used NHTSA funding to promote safe driving by purchasing a speed monitor trailer to collect data. The speed monitoring device warns drivers when they exceed speed limits and helps leaders identify high-risk roads.

And the White Mountain Apache Tribe in Arizona purchased and distributed child safety seats and educational material to parents and caregivers in need, using NHTSA funds.

While we cannot be in person in many tribal communities right now, we intend to be at the upcoming Gathering of Nations Powwow in 2022, and will continue to participate in key tribal events such as the National Transportation in Indian Country Conference and the National Congress of American Indians.

We are proud to be your partner in safety, and we are here to support you in any way we can. Together, we can help everyone drive, pedal, walk and ride safely on tribal lands.