December 13, 2021

Mr. Ryan R. Posten
Associate Administrator for Rulemaking
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, D.C., 20590

RE: Agency Information Collection Activities; Notice and Request for Comments; Vehicle Information for the General Public (Docket No.: NHTSA-2019-0113)

Dear Mr. Posten,

The Alliance for Automotive Innovation ("Auto Innovators") appreciates the opportunity to provide comments in response to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's ("NHTSA") notice and request for comments on a reinstatement (with modification) of a previously approved information collection in support of the dissemination of vehicle safety information through the New Car Assessment Program ("NCAP") and corresponding *www.nhtsa.gov* website.

In general, Auto Innovators is supportive of the intent of this information collection activity, which provides consumers with helpful information about the safety features available on modern vehicles. However, included in this submission, please find comments and recommendations related to the practical utility (and expanding scope) of data elements being collected, the accuracy of the agency's burden estimates, and potential opportunities for enhancing the quality and minimizing the burden of this information collection.

1. **There is a need to consider the expanding scope of this data collection activity**

The scope of this information collection effort has expanded significantly, with recent year-on-year increases in the number of data elements requested as part of each submission. For example, for Model Year (MY) 2021 vehicles, NHTSA requested 534 individual data elements per vehicle model. This subsequently increased to 724 data elements per vehicle model for MY 2022 vehicles – more than a 30% increase. These changes have resulted in an increase in the overall burden associated with each annual submission, requiring addition time and resources to be allocated to ensure that information is reported in a timely and accurate manner, and that the data remains up to date as vehicle models are modified or enhanced to add new features and functionality. It is unclear how NHTSA anticipates the program expanding in the coming years (covered by this three-year request for approval), and whether the predicted burden estimates in this notice account for any increases in the level of information being

requested – particularly as the agency seeks to update NCAP to provide additional information to consumers.

2. **The proposed burden estimates are overly conservative**

Related to expanding scope of this information collection activity, we have concerns that the agency's burden estimate of 5 hours per vehicle is extremely conservative given that more than seven hundred data-points are requested for each vehicle. The estimate does not adequately consider the level of effort required to source information, format the data, and verify the necessary documents for completeness. In addition, multiple departments within the organization may need to be engaged to gather the requested information (to support population of various data elements), which often includes technical information validation, as well as the technical content approval needed prior to submission to ensure accuracy and completeness. Furthermore, any changes to the data as vehicle models are updated (or where corrections may be required) further adds to the number of hours associated with each annual submission.

In addition, due to the cyclical nature of this reporting activity and that the overall level of burden would not necessitate a dedicated full-time employee to compile each annual submission, the duties would typically fall under the responsibilities of existing regulatory staff within each reporting organization. This creates challenges, particularly when there is variability between the estimated burden versus actual burden which negatively affects other aspects of business operations. For example, it may be necessary for a company to modify its processes mid-year to address unanticipated changes to the information collection (such as the aforementioned 30% increase in data elements), which may require resources and workforce attention to be diverted from other tasks. As discussed in more detail, below, these issues could be addressed through more regular stakeholder engagement to review planned changes to this collection activity.

3. **NHTSA should explore opportunities for enhancing the quality of information and minimizing the burden of reporting**

There are opportunities to reduce the reporting burden by enhancing the process for submitting data to the agency. At present, data is submitted using Microsoft Excel document that consists of 19 separate tabs and 724 fillable columns per vehicle model. Both the approach and format present a number of challenges in terms of how data is both input and checked for accuracy, further adding to the overall burden. While this method may have been more appropriate when there were fewer data elements being requested, there is likely a need to reevaluate the current approach. We urge NHTSA to work with respondents to identify potential alternatives and review whether there are more user-friendly options that could be considered moving forward. Any proposed solutions should be focused on streamlining the process, both in terms of data entry and the ability to verify the information for each vehicle

make and model (which currently requires navigating and cross-referencing multiple tabs, rows, and columns within Excel).

In addition, as NHTSA considers future updates to NCAP, the agency should explore opportunities to minimize duplicate reporting requirements in order to help minimize any burden associated with similar requests. We also request that NHTSA periodically review the list of data elements to identify whether certain items can be removed to streamline the process (e.g., where information is found to be redundant or no longer useful). This could include reporting of information on vehicle features that were previously optional equipment when data was first collected, but are now typically standard on modern vehicles. One such example is event data recorders.

NHTSA also notes that:

> *[t]he consumer information collected will be used to disseminate vehicle safety information via the agency's www.nhtsa.gov website, in the 'Purchasing with Safety in Mind: What to look for when buying a new vehicle' brochure, and in other consumer publications.*

However, a significant portion of the information collected does not currently appear to be used to make safety information available to consumers - whether through the agency's website or brochure. While the agency states that it may also use "this information collection to respond to consumer inquiries, analyze rulemaking petitions, and provide technical assistance to Congress," the priority focus of this effort should be to ensure that any additional information collection is not only relevant but also used to make safety information more readily visible to consumers.

4. **We encourage additional stakeholder meetings to help proactively improve the information collection process in the future**

To help enhance the quality of reporting and minimize overall burden, we request that NHTSA host two stakeholder meetings per year. The first proposed meeting would be to discuss planned updates to the program prior to any changes being finalized. This would provide an opportunity for the agency to provide additional background on the rationale for requesting any new data elements, and to identify suggestions for improving the overall data collection process (both for existing and new elements). The second proposed meeting would be similar to prior annual briefings where the agency would review the final changes to the submission requirements and address any outstanding questions. Providing these opportunities for additional dialogue will help ensure that more robust processes are in place and inform more accurate burden estimates moving forward.

5. Conclusion

Auto Innovators is generally supportive of this information collection activity as it provides helpful information to consumers on the safety performance of vehicles. However, as outlined above, there are a number of process improvements that could be implemented to ensure that the level of burden is minimized, that the scope and corresponding level of detail of information being requested remains reasonable and that, consistent with the original intent of this collection activity, future burden estimates more closely match the expected level of effort and resources needed to compile and maintain the data.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Scott Schmidt
Vice President, Safety Policy