

## **Institute of Transportation Studies at University of California Davis**

Dr. Steven Cliff, NHTSA Deputy Administrator | Anniversary Dinner Keynote

**Friday, May 13, 2022 |**

### **AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY**

Good evening. Thank you so much for the invitation to be here tonight and Dan (Sperling), thank you for that introduction. For those that don't know, Dan is a large part of the reason I'm standing here today – why I'm in the transportation field and now lead the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration or NHTSA.

In 2007, Dan and Tony Wexler put my name in to attend a short course on the intersection between advocacy and science. At the time, I was an assistant research professor at UC Davis studying the climate and air pollution effects of global atmospheric transport of particulate matter. That short course changed my path.

Soon after, I landed in the now-defunct Office of Climate Change at CARB, then went to Caltrans, transferred back to CARB, and am now at NHTSA. None of that would have been possible without that push from Dan.

When Dan was Chair of the Transportation Research Board Executive Committee a few years ago, I marveled that he was my “boss” in three different venues – ITS, TRB, and CARB. Dan retorted something to the effect that this meant I could ignore his direction in three different jobs. Well Dan, I'm here tonight, so clearly, I can take some direction!

Dan, thank you. Your leadership as a mentor, professor, and founding director of ITS-Davis has shaped my career and the paths of hundreds, if not thousands of students and professionals, several of whom are in this audience tonight.

The UC Davis Institute of Transportation Studies is recognized as the world's leading university transportation program focused on sustainability and for good reason! Your research is broadening our understanding of the impact of transportation on climate change – and how we as a society can move toward zero emissions vehicles by studying how people interact with these technologies.

You have examined congestion, efficiency, and the impact of autonomous vehicles and ride-sharing programs on public transit and car dependency. You have researched how micromobility can help address the “last mile” problem. And you are promoting bicycles as an environmentally friendly, healthy means of transit.

Your commitment to environmental justice and incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout your work and your student body inspires me. As your acknowledgment says online, you are acting, quote, “to create a more accessible and equitable transportation future—one that serves all people.”

That's something we can all support.

And it's also what we're striving to do at NHTSA. Our work touches every single person in the United States every day. If you walk, bike, ride, roll or drive – our work helps keep you safe. NHTSA's work

focuses on making our roads safer for everyone while integrating policies that make transportation more environmentally friendly and equitable.

Our mission is safety – it's literally our middle name. Traffic fatalities make up about 95 percent of all transportation-related deaths in this country which is unacceptable. We must change a culture that accepts the loss of tens of thousands of people in traffic crashes as inevitable.

Our mission has perhaps never been more critical than it is at this very moment. When normal life came to a halt in March 2020, many of us initially expected traffic fatalities to decline as more people stayed home. Instead, we saw the opposite. Risky driving behaviors skyrocketed, and traffic fatalities spiked to the highest level in 13 years.

And sadly, the trends that we hoped were limited to 2020 continued into 2021. We are planning to release our 2021 preliminary early estimates next week and the projected increases are alarming. Action is needed now.

We cannot let increases in road fatalities become the new normal. These are people, not statistics. They are mothers, fathers, children, loved ones, friends, and coworkers – and their loss is a loss for us all.

NHTSA – and I – take this crisis extremely seriously. Every aspect of our work is dedicated to saving lives, preventing crashes, and reducing the severity of the crashes.

Our work is incredibly diverse. In any given week, I may be working on issues related to impaired driving, car seat safety, fraudulent motorcycle helmets, emergency medical services, and, of course, new vehicle technologies. NHTSA's Office of Emergency Medical Services oversees 9-1-1 services for the U.S. and played a critical role in helping first responders during the pandemic. And two-thirds of our budget is dedicated to state safety offices to improve roadway safety locally.

We are also home to the odometer fraud division, which roots out schemes that put lives at risk and that defrauds unwitting buyers costing consumers more than a billion dollars each year. And our registered importers office makes sure that all vehicles brought into the U.S. meet our rigorous safety standards.

We have an incredible team of statisticians that gathers crash data from across the country to help us better understand injury and fatality trends. Our behavioral research team uses those data to develop countermeasures to change behaviors and educate the public about the risks of dangerous driving, like driving impaired or distracted, speeding, or not wearing a seat belt.

Our communications office develops the safety campaigns you see on billboards or while watching football games, such as the Click It or Ticket campaign that I kicked off yesterday.

Our active enforcement office investigates vehicle safety defects and oversees more than 1,000 safety recalls which affect tens of millions of vehicles each year. And our rulemaking team uses data, research, and science to write new regulations that strengthen safety and protect all road users.

One area of particular interest to you – and to me – is our work on fuel economy. On his first day in office, President Biden tasked us with reviewing the Corporate Average Fuel Economy or CAFE standards to see if they could be improved to reduce transportation's impact on climate. This is also an issue of

equity since we know that harmful effects from the transportation system disproportionately impact low-income and communities of color.

As you know, NHTSA is directed by statute to set maximum feasible CAFE standards to improve energy conservation.

At the end of March, I signed landmark fuel economy standards to strengthen our nation's security, that will save consumers more than \$192 billion and reduce fuel use by more than 220 billion gallons. These standards reduce pollution equivalent to removing 5 million of today's vehicles from the road by requiring an industry-wide fleet average of approximately 49 mpg for passenger cars and light trucks in model year 2026.

But this is only a beginning. We're now working on the next phase of standards for cars and trucks. We will continue to advance policies that promote environmental justice, address long-standing equity issues, and promote safety.

Speaking of safety ... There's so much discussion about the potential of automated vehicles, or as we call them: automated driving systems, or ADS.

While we all recognize that ADS-equipped vehicles can offer tremendous opportunities at their maturity, and many in the sector are working to reach that point, NHTSA is committed to making sure this is all done safely.

In March, we issued a first-of-its-kind final rule to safeguard occupants in ADS vehicles. As the driver changes from a person to a machine in ADS-equipped vehicles, the need to keep people safe remains the same and must be integrated from the beginning. With this rule, we ensure that manufacturers put safety first.

NHTSA stands ready to use our enforcement authority to hold manufacturers accountable if they introduce products – including ADS – that may create an unreasonable risk to safety.

As we're thinking about the next phase of our work, in addition to safety as the foundation, we envision that these vehicles will also address equity and environmental concerns.

These vehicles could one day serve people who are not able to drive themselves or who have been reliant on sparse transit networks. Individuals would be able to enjoy independence – the ability to go to the grocery store, school, work, the doctor's office, a restaurant, or visit friends without relying on family or others for a ride. These vehicles should be designed for many different users to meet the needs of people of all ages, incomes, neighborhoods, and mobility considerations.

ADS technologies offer an opportunity to rethink land-use development and curb-space allocation in communities. For example, public spaces can be transformed if parking is devoted to other uses such as parks, gardens, or housing.

With thoughtful planning, ADS technologies can potentially improve air pollution, leading to better public health outcomes and reduced traffic congestion.

As our transportation system continues to evolve, there will undoubtedly be great opportunities, and some challenges, along the way. This is a time of significant change, but one that has the potential to revolutionize the way we live, work, and travel.

The policy decisions we make today, and the priorities we set, can positively influence the development of innovative technologies. Changes in the automotive sector, if done carefully, can also provide an opportunity to address inequities and racial disparities that have been perpetuated for generations. Together, we can achieve our vision of a safer transportation system for all, one with zero fatalities and serious injuries.

I know that ITS-Davis will be a critical part of making this vision for the future a reality. Your leadership, ideas, and work can help make all the difference. We can create a more equitable, sustainable, safer world for ourselves and future generations by working together.

Thank you so much for your time, and congratulations again on 30 wonderful years.