



Statement of Anthony Green
Public Policy Director of Safe Kids Worldwide
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
Public Listening Session
NHTSA 2014-2018 Strategic Plan

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Introduction: Thank you for giving Safe Kids the opportunity to be heard at this public listening session as the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) prepares its plan to meet the challenges it will face in the next five years, and beyond.

Safe Kids was founded 26 years ago to change a fact that was largely unknown to most Americans, that unintentional injury is the number one killer of kids 19 and under. And today preventable injury remains the number one killer of kids, a fact that still is not recognized by most Americans. Within that fact, car crashes are the leading contributor to that data. We have made progress—since 1988, the number of kids dying in car crashes has declined by 58 percent. But we still have a lot of work to do. This strategic plan will help us stay on the road to greater safety for all Americans. Safety on streets will be the number one multiplier to change the math of child unintentional injury.

There are times when a strategic plan largely should follow successful paths that have been taken, and because of NHTSA's record of success, especially related to kids' safety, much of what I will suggest to you is to stay the course and remain vigilant about what has worked in the past. Some of what I suggest to you are common sense measures we have known and used for decades. The set of best practices under the umbrella of Vision Zero, for example, are visionary because we bring them together: lowering a speed zone, creating a speed bump, providing better lighting and making directions and signage more clear. Recently, the new Mayor of New York City Bill De Blasio embraced Vision Zero in what of his first major initiatives. We applaud him for that vision. Vision Zero, since it was developed in Sweden, has been a quiet movement embraced by states and cities in the U.S., with a proven track record, including: Minnesota, Utah, Washington, Oregon and West Virginia, Chicago, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C.

We can follow a child's path from the day he or she is taken from the hospital as an infant to the moment they turn the key (or push the button) of a car for their first time as a fully-privileged driver and understand the path we must use to meet the challenges relating to child safety over the next five years and beyond.

Restraining Our Kids in Cars: Protecting kids in cars and on roads and highways is part of Safe Kids' DNA throughout its 26 years. Safe Kids and NHTSA have been partners for much of this time. In an official sense, NHTSA designates Safe Kids as the body that certifies technicians who have the expertise to check for correct use and installation of car seats. Today, more than 36,000 certified child passenger technicians work in every state to make families safer.

NHTSA research shows that parents get good report cards on putting their kids in child restraint systems but two recent reports raise a significant question on whether we are slipping back to bad habits. In 2013, Safe Kids conducted a survey of 1,000 parents and determined that car seat use is not at all universal for every ride, every time. Because many parents were acknowledging their own errors, we believe that the answers were candid ones. For example, 1 in 3 parents told us that it is acceptable to leave a child unrestrained for a short ride, even though 60% of crashes involving children occur 10

minutes or less from home. Younger parents said that it is acceptable to ride with children unrestrained when traveling overnight.

Moreover, we know from other research that child restraints are misused 73% of the time in critical ways.

The February 2014 CDC Vital Signs reported that a third of children who died in crashes in 2011 were not buckled up and, at the same time, that more than 800 lives could have been saved if car seats were used by 100% of 0–4 year olds says that from 2002–2011. Based on the foregoing data, Safe Kids sees a need for states to renew a commitment to awareness and enforcement, and NHTSA is the agency can make the most headway in this regard. Here, we say stay the course.

Safe Kids commends NHTSA for the role it plays in keeping car seats safe, and the interrelationship between the engineering of cars and child restraint systems. The recent Graco recall and the new side impact regulation are just two examples of this work. On NHTSA's diligence in testing the engineering of child restraint systems, we say stay the course.

Pre-teens: We all know of the importance of sustained safety messages to parents and teens learning to drive. However, an overlooked group that is a captive audience to hear important safety messages is pre-teens. Safe Kids believes there is value to sensitizing pre-drivers about a culture of safety. Preteens are excited about the prospect of driving and ready and willing to listen and learn. Based on this, Safe Kids supports NHTSA's embrace of a wide range of programs to teach preteens and young teens about safe driving before they start to drive. This may involve peer-to-peer education as well as programs which foster unique agreements between parents and pre-drivers.

Teens: The data on teen driving paints a disturbing picture. Motor vehicle crashes are the number one killer of our teenagers. The fatal crash rate per mile driven for 16-19 year-olds is nearly 3 times the rate for drivers ages 20 and over. Rightfully so we have seen an increased emphasis on protecting teens and their victims on the roads. There has been progress over time: In 2012, 2,823 teenagers aged 13-19 died in motor vehicle crashes, which is 68% fewer than died in 1975. In that time, states adopted the three-tiered system for new drivers to obtain their licenses. With GDL, Safe Kids says stay the course.

Graduated Drivers License laws are a game changer in preventing teen fatalities and the most comprehensive GDL programs are associated with reductions of 38% to 40% in fatal and injury crashes, respectively, among 16-year-old drivers on the roads. We must work together to encourage states to pass the strongest GDL laws we can. As Congress considers a successor to MAP-21, there should be serious dialogue about how to make the GDL incentive grant program more viable so that conscientious states can obtain the benefits of the proposed grant program. The law we have now has the best of intentions, but is not working because no state can meet the criteria of the law.

Heat Stroke: One of the hardest things on which we work together involves small children left behind in cars when it's warm and they die of heat stroke. We have worked hard on this, but, still, last year the deaths exceeded the number occurring the two years before by ten. The number of lives lost is relatively small, but the nature of the deaths is frightening, as well as the implications for the surviving parent. We hope that the strategic plan will work towards reducing this number significantly.

Highway Trust Fund: I would be remiss if I talked about the foregoing demands without the need to deal with the insolvency of the Highway Trust Fund. This must be solved, or very few of the things we have discussed can happen. We applaud Secretary Foxx for his focus on this issue.

Livable Communities: Something that affects kids of all ages is the importance of building safe schools and communities surrounding schools. Safe Routes to School has been an important player in this field with proven results. In New York City, a study found that the rate of child pedestrian injuries during school hours fell by around 44 percent following the introduction of infrastructure improvements to reduce speed and make walking route more sensible. The California Department of Transportation estimated that the safety benefit of SRTS was up to a 49 percent decrease in the childhood bicycle and pedestrian collision rates, while, at the same time, walking and biking has increased in the range of 20 to 200 percent. We understand that this is within the jurisdiction of FHWA, but the experience of NHTSA can help to make these initiatives more successful.

Conclusion: When I say stay the course, of course, I am not urging NHTSA to stay frozen in the past. The world is changing and innovation is fundamental. In 2010, it has been estimated that there were one billion cars on the planet. By just 2018 that number may rise to as high as 1.5 billion. We applaud NHTSA for the leadership it has brought to our roads and highways. Whether it's working on changing, staying the course or building programs that work, we look forward to being NHTSA's partner in the job of saving the lives of kids. We must defeat that fact that is so disheartening, that preventable injury is the number one killer of kids. The work we do together is our best opportunity to change the calculation. Safe Kids appreciates this opportunity to be heard on issues vital to keeping our kids safe on the road and in motor vehicles.

Contact:

Safe Kids Worldwide Public Policy Team

Anthony Green
agreen@safekids.org
Office: 202.662.0606 / Cell: 202.615.4300

Roshan Alemi
ralemi@safekids.org
Office: 202.662.4471

Fax: 202.393.2072 / www.safekids.org
1301 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Suite 1000