

STATUS REPORT**FEDERAL ROLE
IN
TRAFFIC SAFETY****INSURANCE INSTITUTE for HIGHWAY SAFETY**

Watergate Office Building
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MOST FUNDING GOES FOR DRIVER EDUCATION

A recent tabulation by the Federal Highway Administration shows 24 per cent of all highway safety grant money "obligated" since the inception of the federal grant program has been in the driver education standard area.

Figures released by the FHWA at year-end showed as of November 30, 1968, a total of \$36,644,937 had been obligated for safety projects in the 52 states and their local communities, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Of that sum, \$8,629,854 was for driver education projects, making it the most popular of 16 different program areas.

For grant purposes, program areas coincide with the 16 highway safety standards except that motorcycle safety projects are being funded under other program headings. There is also a "planning and administration" project category for which no standard applies.

The funding breakdown by program area for the first 23 months of activity:

Driver Education -- \$8,629,854

Traffic Records -- \$7,317,700

Planning and Administration -- \$4,653,211

Police Traffic Services -- \$3,669,342

Emergency Medical Services -- \$2,566,413

Driver Licensing -- \$2,206,428

Alcohol in Relation to Highway Safety -- \$2,062,876

Identification and Surveillance of Accident Locations -- \$1,885,525

Motor Vehicle Inspection -- \$1,560,229

Traffic Control Devices -- \$913,149

Highway Design, Construction and Maintenance -- \$382,666

Pedestrian Safety - \$241,397

Motor Vehicle Registration - \$217,361

Traffic Courts - \$207,955

Codes and Laws -- \$125,831

Accident Cleanup -- \$5,000

Under the Highway Safety Act of 1966, money is made available to the states and their communities on a 50-50 matching basis to achieve compliance with the 16 highway safety standards. Forty per cent of a state's apportionment must go to so-called political subdivisions, primarily cities and counties or their components.

It is because of the 40 per cent requirement that a relatively large proportion of grant money has gone into driver education. While local jurisdictions generally have been indifferent about instituting innovative safety projects, they have been willing to accept money to help hard-pressed school districts pay for high school driver education. The driver education assistance takes various forms.

It is expected that the recent dissemination of a "priority list" by the National Highway Safety Bureau, which listed driver education 10th in terms of funding priority, will have the effect of deterring routine driver education projects. It is not envisioned that the Bureau will reject all driver education requests, however, because this is one program required in all states under the Highway Safety Act. Indeed, the Act specifies that no state can have a program "approved" by the Secretary of Transportation unless it has a driver education program with five specific components. Considerable research as to the efficacy of driver education is underway with the hope of achieving some new insights as to where driver education fits in the highway safety scheme of things.

According to FHWA records, as of November 30 there were only six states -- Maine, Ohio, Florida, North Dakota, Nevada, and Alaska -- and Puerto Rico that had not received federal aid for driver education projects. Some may have been pending.

The No. 2 program area, at least in terms of monetary popularity, is traffic records, with a total of \$7,317,700 obligated. The state of Ohio has accounted for more than \$2 million of this sum in one comprehensive records project.

All 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia have received planning and administration grants that range in size from \$4,650 for Texas to \$343,083 for Pennsylvania. Planning and administration money is used for a broad range of activities, including salaries, travel, equipment, and the use of outside consultant services.

Of the \$36.6 million obligated for all projects as of November 30, only \$11,979,000, or about 19 per cent, was from the \$63.8 million available for obligation in fiscal 1969.

NHSB officials said they were not concerned by the relatively slow obligation rate since a large backlog of project requests remained to be acted upon. It appeared, however, that a similar situation to 1968, when projects were processed on a crash basis in the waning days of the fiscal year, could be shaping up.

Some states have used very little of the obligating authority available for them in fiscal 1969, among them some of the largest and most progressive in highway safety. Unused funds under the highway safety program are not lost since they are carry-forward provisions, but obligating rate -- rightly or wrongly -- is considered by some to be a gauge of program interest and performance. A shortage of personnel in the FHWA and NHSB has hampered the functioning of the grant program.

REPORT CRITICIZES SAFETY INFORMATION

A popular contemporary aphorism has been enunciated again in a report that examines the relationship between the mass communications media and the informational activities of a broad variety of safety organizations. According to the New York public relations firm of Dudley-Anderson-Yutzy, a "communications and credibility gap" exists.

Under a contract with the Office of Public Affairs of the Federal Highway Administration, Dudley-Anderson-Yutzy surveyed newspapers, magazines, television and radio stations to determine their reaction to the information emanating from safety organizations, and asked the safety organizations to comment on the media.

Although the response by the media people to mailed questionnaires was poor, and their added failure to turn out for a three-day eyeball confrontation at Warrenton, Va., last August gave the project a somewhat lop-sided character, it emerged from the available evidence that the media agree most safety information is unsatisfactory. Safety practitioners, on the other hand, feel the media are failing on several counts in covering the continuing "safety story."

Since the prospects of changing the media would appear slim, this issue of the Status Report focuses on some of the media's criticisms of safety information on the theory that if the shoe fits, it should not be cast in bronze.

For openers, the researchers found that "70 per cent of the media people polled and interviewed find material they get from highway safety organizations unusable and ineffective." Overwhelmingly, the media believe they are getting "outmoded" information, with too much emphasis on "scare" techniques and not enough research information on crash causation.

"Almost . . . 75 per cent regard more and more detailed information on research in highway safety as the most important and useful kinds of materials they would wish to have in place of the general run of promotional materials now made available," the report says.

Fifty-eight per cent of the media feel police and other units of local government fail to provide adequate information as to factors present in highway crashes.

While the media have a 77 per cent negative attitude toward information received from the federal government, which was evaluated along with information from other quasi-official and private sources, they believe federal officials ultimately constitute the best source of safety information, particularly research findings.

There are at least two reasons why there is a "growing dissatisfaction" among the media concerning the quality and quantity of highway safety information from traditional sources, according to the report. One, there is a general failure on the part of safety communicators to transfer new information into their promotional and public education schemes, and, two, public and official interest in highway safety is "slackening" and those in the field are failing to overcome it.

Among major recommendations growing out of the Warrenton meeting between media representatives and safety activists were (1) the need to develop a "book of guidelines" on how to cover vehicle crashes for media people, police, and others who are on-the-scene sources of information, (2) improvement among safety professionals in handling research, promotional and legislative matters, and (3) the need to coordinate public and private efforts at all levels, with a leadership role being exercised by the National Highway Safety Advisory Committee.

SUBCOMMITTEE SEEKS INSURANCE DATA

The Senate Subcommittee on Antitrust and Monopoly Legislation, headed by Sen. Philip A. Hart (D-Mich.), has mailed a questionnaire to associations representing major elements of the automobile insurance business, and to some companies themselves, as part of its inquiry into the auto repair field.

The subcommittee in December opened a series of hearings into the functioning of the auto repair system with particular attention on consumer and safety issues.

The auto insurance business has been asked for average costs for various types of collisions as they relate to nine American and foreign models for the period from 1958 through July 31, 1968; for paid claims information calculated on a national, regional, and state basis; for information about salaries paid auto repairmen and mechanics in 14 major U.S. cities; for data on the administrative costs of handling accident claims; for data on "repeat collisions; for information on any cooperative ventures with the automobile manufacturers aimed at constructing cars in such a way as to "minimize the danger to occupants or assist in reducing the costs for repair of vehicles which have been involved in collisions;" and for other information.

Concurrently, Senator Hart was known to be urging the Department of Transportation to accelerate its program to find out the relationship between mechanical failure and highway accidents. The Department already has one related contract with Operations Research, Inc., Silver Spring, Md.

COMPREHENSIVE PLANS -- Virtually all states have submitted to the Secretary of Transportation the comprehensive safety plans called for under the Highway Safety Act of 1966. The Act specifies every state must have a program "approved by the Secretary, designed to reduce traffic accidents and deaths, injuries, and property damage resulting therefrom." The penalty for non-compliance is the loss of eligibility to participate in the safety grant-in-aid program, and after December 31, 1969, the possible loss of federal-aid highway construction funds. Although state plans have been coming into the NHSB for weeks, none has yet been approved by the Secretary. Staff evaluation of the plans is underway and it is expected the job of "approving" the state plans will fall primarily, if not entirely, on the new Secretary of Transportation. Modifications may have to be made before some state plans are approved. The submissions to date, according to NHSB officials, reflect state attitudes ranging from obvious indifference to serious in-depth long-range planning.

MORE TIME FOR COMMENT -- The Federal Highway Administrator on December 31 granted more time for the submission of comments on proposals aimed at requiring the auto manufacturers to provide consumers with specific safety performance information. The deadline was extended from January 8 to the close of business March 10 on four proposals and limited aspects of two others. No additional time was granted for comments on proposals dealing with acceleration and passing ability, tire reserve load, and the principal aspects of automobile braking. (See Status Report No. 70, dated December 30 for more information.)

BUS CRASH REPORT -- The National Transportation Safety Board, which primarily concerns itself with the investigation of air crashes, has reported on its investigation of a Greyhound bus crash near Baker, Calif., in which 19 passengers were killed. The report says that while a drunk driver in an automobile "caused" the accident, design features in the bus itself contributed to the end tragedy. The Board reported unbelted bus passengers (there is no requirement for safety belts on buses) were tossed into a jumble when the bus landed on its side, that vaporized power steering fluid and then diesel oil fueled a fire, and that occupants were unable to get to exits. The semi-autonomous Board which advises the Secretary of Transportation concluded that bus passengers should wear seat belts, that fluid and fuel systems should be better protected, and that buses need more dependable escape routes.

NADER CHARGES -- The bus crash referred to in the previous item has caused Safety Crusader Ralph Nader to charge that the relationship between the Interstate Commerce Commission, the Department of Transportation's Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety, and the Greyhound Corporation is "a classic example of regulatory subservience to the industry it is supposed to regulate." In a letter to a DOT official, Mr. Nader also charged Greyhound had attempted to suppress a report on the crash prepared by a UCLA medical-engineering investigating team. A spokesman for Greyhound denied the charges.

NADER NAMED TO COUNCIL -- Secretary of Transportation Alan S. Boyd has given his successor a surprise legacy -- the appointment of Safety Critic Ralph Nader to the National Motor Vehicle Safety Advisory Council. Mr. Nader, a champion of consumer issues and author of a 1966 book that propelled traffic safety into national prominence, was named to a three-year term on the Council, which advises the Secretary of Transportation on a

broad range of vehicle safety subjects. Other new appointees on the 22-member Council are Sol Edidin, Counsel and Secretary of the Hertz Corporation, New York; Ralph Millet, Old Saybrook, Conn., President of Saab USA, Inc.; James P. Mozingo III, Darlington, S.C., member of the South Carolina Senate; and Berkeley Sweet, Bethesda, Md., Executive Vice President, Truck Body and Equipment Association. James W. Hall, Chairman of the Board of Red Ivey's Automotive Service, Atlanta, Ga., was reappointed to the Council. While there was speculation that the appointment and acceptance of government per diem fees would compromise Mr. Nader's style, there were other indications that he would be as free-wheeling as ever.

WARRANTY HEARINGS -- The opening of hearings by the Federal Trade Commission into the functioning of the automobile warranty system has produced a stream of witnesses concerned about safety as well as other considerations. The point of departure has been a FTC staff report that itemize deficiencies in manufacturer warranty systems but advocated that manufacturer responsibility had to be maintained "to assure a high degree of safety and convenience in the daily operation of automobiles." Dr. William Haddon, Jr., head of the NHTSB, agreed with this position in a letter to the FTC. He said warranties also were important because they generate information upon which recall campaigns can be based. Sen. Gaylord Nelson (D-Wis.) zeroed in on the tire warranty which, he said, "more often than not. . . proves to be sham," and Rep. Charles Vanik (D-Ohio) recommended car buyers be given a choice of a 90-day or a two-year warranty. Chrysler Corp. was critical of findings in the staff report that indicated all recalled vehicles were defective. Chrysler said of 118,079 1968 vehicles recalled as of December 5, 1968, fewer than 9,200 had defective parts. The hearings are continuing.

MOTORCYCLE CASE -- The U.S. Supreme Court has refused to hear a case involving the conviction of a motorcyclist who refused to wear a protective helmet, which has the effect of giving legal substance to the NHTSB's standard on motorcycle safety. The case, involving the Commonwealth of Massachusetts vs. Robert H. Howie, Jr., was appealed through the Massachusetts court system and to the U.S. Supreme Court on grounds that the headgear requirement was unconstitutional. The finding in Massachusetts was that it was "within the power of the Legislature to adopt reasonable measures for the promotion of safety on public ways in the interests of motorcyclists and others who may use them."

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 WATERGATE OFFICE BUILDING
 2600 VIRGINIA AVENUE, N.W. • WASHINGTON, D.C. 20037

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