

STATUS REPORT

FEDERAL ROLE
IN
HIGHWAY SAFETY

INSURANCE INSTITUTE for HIGHWAY SAFETY

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PROPOSED 1970 HIGHWAY ACT CALLS FOR FUND CHANGES

The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1970, introduced by Rep. William C. Cramer (R-Fla.), ranking minority member of the House Public Works Committee, calls for changes in the formula of allocating federal funds to states for highway safety programs, and, for the first time, stipulates that Highway Trust Fund monies be used in carrying out highway safety programs.

If passed, the bill (H. R. 16788) would also settle pending legislative considerations necessary to finalizing National Highway Safety Bureau removal from the Federal Highway Administration.

Current allocation of federal funds to states is based solely on state population, a formula favored by the Department of Transportation. The bill now under House consideration would change the formula for allocating funds from that basis to one reflecting a combination of population and public road mileage.

The proposed formula is: "75 per centum in the ratio which the population of each State bears to the total population of all the States, as shown by the latest available Federal census, and 25 per centum in the ratio which the public roads mileage in each State bears to the total public road mileage in all States."

The formula change would give less populous states a larger percentage of federal funds to carry out highway safety programs.

The bill also would give the NHSB a new name and official status within the Department of Transportation as an Administration.

The bill states:

-- "There is hereby established within the Department of Transportation a Federal Highway Traffic Safety Administration . . . The Administration shall be headed by an Administrator who shall be appointed by the President"

-- "The Secretary (of Transportation) shall carry out, through the Federal Highway Administration, those provisions of the Highway Safety Act of 1966 . . . for highway safety programs, research and development relating to uniform standards which the Secretary is authorized to promulgate pertaining to highway design, construction and maintenance, traffic control devices, identification and surveillance of accident locations, and highway-related aspects of pedestrian safety."

-- "The Secretary shall carry out, through the (Federal Highway Traffic Safety) Administration, those provisions of such Act for highway safety programs, research and development relating to all other uniform standards which the Secretary is authorized to promulgate."

Proposed fund authorizations in the bill for carrying out highway safety programs, research and development, with all figures in millions, are:

	FHWA (3 Standards)		FHTSA (13 Standards)	
	1971	1972	1971	1972
Highway Safety Programs	\$30*	\$30*	\$75	\$75
Highway Safety Research and Development	\$10	\$10	\$30	\$30

*\$15 million to be taken from the Highway Trust Fund.

NSAC URGES ALCOHOL TEST DEMONSTRATION

The Presidentially appointed National Safety Advisory Committee has passed a resolution urging the Department of Transportation to initiate a demonstration alcohol pre-arrest screening test project similar to the British and Baton Rouge, La., pre-arrest approaches.

The British statute was used as a model for the Baton Rouge ordinance which permits a police officer to administer chemical tests of blood alcohol content to drivers who have been charged with moving violations or involved in crashes, when the driver is suspected of being under the influence of alcohol. Legislation to establish a similar procedure on a state-wide scale is currently under consideration in Michigan.

The Baton Rouge ordinance, which was developed by the Institute, is being enforced under the premise that drivers give "implied consent" to take the test by using public streets and highways. The ordinance is yet to undergo a court test in Baton Rouge.

According to National Highway Safety Director Douglas Toms, the problem of combating the abusive drinker who drives is being given top priority in the traffic safety program.

Toms sees alcohol as the "toughest" problem the Bureau faces ". . . because you are dealing with people rather than hardware," he said in the recent NSAC meeting.

Toms disclosed at last week's NATO conference on passive restraints that within a matter of weeks he will announce a comprehensive nationwide program for dealing with the problem of alcohol as it relates to highway safety.

When NHSB was separated from the Federal Highway Administration, an Office of Alcohol Programs was created in the Bureau. This office would be the one to develop any alcohol pre-arrest screening test demonstration or other safety-related alcohol program undertaken by the Bureau as a result of the Advisory Committee's recommendation.

NATO PASSIVE RESTRAINT CONFERENCE BARES CONFLICT

A major confrontation between automobile manufacturers and the Department of Transportation's National Highway Safety Bureau appears to be in the making over the proposed deadline for compliance with the NHSB passive restraint standard.

The NATO passive restraint conference held last week at GM's Milford, Mich., proving grounds provided a forum for automobile manufacturers to demonstrate developments in the area of passive restraints and voice their skepticism at being able to meet the 1973 DOT deadline for installation of passive restraint systems in all automobiles sold in the U. S.

The conference centered largely around developments in air bag technology -- to date the most promising passive restraint system to be developed. Demonstrations included Toyota's presentation of a system, triggered by a radar-like device, which activates the bag prior to actual crash and would thus allow less explosive inflation. Extensive, detailed attention was given in the GM presentation to the problem of insuring actuation when needed and freedom from inappropriate firing through aerospace reliability engineering techniques new to the auto industry. Rocket Research Corporation, in an "air induction inflation system," introduced a system which envelops air in the vehicle rather than employing compressed bottled gas. The system, deployed by "tiny rocket motors," reduces considerably the shotgun type blast that accompanies the sudden inflation of the more conventional systems powered by stored gas or explosive-produced gas.

Edward N. Cole, president of General Motors, has termed the DOT 1973 deadline "unrealistic." He said that one engineer has estimated it would take more than 12 years before a fail-safe passive restraint system could be mass produced. Ford spokesmen voiced similar skepticism.

In the opening session of the conference, Transportation Secretary John Volpe told the auto makers, "I know they (air bags) work; I've seen them work. There is too much at stake to turn back."

NHSB Director Douglas Toms is reported to have said during an interview that if manufacturers appear to be resisting the proposed standard, "We'll just turn up the flame."

The Wall Street Journal reported a GM spokesman as saying a delay will be sought on the air bag requirement. Other manufacturers are expected to follow GM's lead during the June 24 NHSB public hearing on the proposed passive restraint standard.

CALIFORNIA JOINS FLORIDA WITH BETTER BUMPER BILLS

California legislators have joined Florida solons in considering legislation aimed at reducing automobile damage resulting from low-speed crashes.

Two bills -- one before the California Senate, the other before the state Assembly -- would require that cars sold in the state withstand low-speed front and rear-end barrier crashes without damage.

The Senate bill would require that cars sold in the state after January 1, 1973, be able to ". . . withstand, without substantial damage . . . impacts at speeds up to and including 10 miles per hour both to the front and rear of the vehicle"

The Assembly bill would require passenger vehicles sold in the state after January 1, 1975, to be constructed to resist front and rear crashes at five miles per hour.

A Florida bill which has already passed the state Senate by a vote of 36-6 requires that cars sold in the state after January 1, 1973, be equipped with bumpers capable of withstanding impact into a standard barrier at five miles per hour without damage. As of January 1, 1975, the no-damage speed would be increased to 10 miles per hour.

Hearings on the California bills are scheduled to begin this week. The Florida bill still faces action by the state's lower house.

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NOTICE: Due to staff vacations, the next issue of Status Report will be published in mid-June.

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