

PEDESTRIAN SAFETY ACTION URGED

Pressure is building for stepped-up action by the Department of Transportation to reduce the level of pedestrian hazard found in present-day vehicle designs.

Both DOT's National Transportation Safety Board and attorney Ralph Nader are urging the federal agency to substantially step up the pace of its pedestrian protection activities.

In a special study of "The Status of Pedestrian Safety Efforts of the Department of Transportation," NTSB — an investigative panel that makes recommendations for improving DOT's safety program performance — says that although "the design of the vehicle to minimize occupant injuries has been a major approach in recent years . . . no similar action has been taken in pedestrian safety." It adds that "no effort has been made to invent devices for pedestrian protection that would parallel seat belts or dash panel cushions for occupant protection."

NTSB's special study finds that DOT's pedestrian-oriented safety efforts are "of a level well below the proportion of pedestrian fatalities" — eighteen per cent of all highway fatalities in the past three years, and in urban areas, "at least half the traffic fatalities" — with the burden falling heaviest on very young and very old people who are "particularly deserving of protection."

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It notes with favor that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has included pedestrian impact criteria in its experimental safety car contracts, and also has contracted with Cornell Aeronautical Laboratory to investigate pedestrian crashes "with a view to redesign of the vehicle to reduce the injuries." But, it adds, even taking these activities into account, "less than \$400,000 has been spent through fiscal year 1970 on specifically labeled pedestrian safety research (nothing for demonstration) on this problem, out

of a total of approximately \$62 million spent for research and development and demonstrations since establishment of (the agency), some 0.64 per cent of the total."

Overall DOT efforts for pedestrian protection "vary between one-eighteenth and one-ninth of the effort that would be in proportion to pedestrian fatalities," the report concludes. To remedy this, DOT should:

- "Create an organizational responsibility" to coordinate its now diffused pedestrian safety efforts — "a publicly visible mechanism and expression of a continuing active interest by DOT in highway pedestrian safety;"
- Seek additional funds for pedestrian safety research and for state-level pedestrian safety programs receiving federal assistance;
- Increase "efforts by the NHTSA in pedestrian safety research and development and in development of vehicle safety standards to reduce pedestrian accidents and injuries, and . . . efforts by the Federal Highway Administration in motor carrier safety regulations (for trucks) to reduce pedestrian accidents and injuries."

Nader's comments are directed specifically at NHTSA's failure, to date, to complete its four-year-old rulemaking proceeding (docket 2-5) in which a standard is proposed to discourage pedestrian-assaulting exterior protrusions on motor vehicles. In a letter to Acting NHTSA Administrator Douglas Toms, Nader urges "prompt issuance of the proposed rulemaking The absence of further rulemaking on this subject since December 1967 implies a tragic lack of priority and determination within the (NHTSA) to reduce the 10,000 pedestrian deaths and half million injuries yearly."

Even before issuing the standard, Nader adds, NHTSA should take the "interim" steps of sending "strong advisory communications . . . to the presidents of each automobile company" warning them against designing sharp edges, points, "under-bumper treatments that can shovel children down and into tire-wheel areas," and other hazardous configurations into the fronts of their cars.

Current interest in the relationship of vehicle exterior designs to pedestrian deaths and injuries surfaced in Senate Commerce Committee hearings earlier this year into the susceptibility of contemporary car designs to low-speed damage. (See Status Report Vol. 6, No. 5, Mar. 10, 1971.)

During one session of the hearings, Toms told Sen. Vance Hartke (D-Ind.), who was chairing the session, that while NHTSA is "bothered" about the pedestrian hazard implications of a number of front-end designs — snouts, sharp points, W-shaped grills and others — found on new cars, the agency has not written to any manufacturer to express concern about particular pedestrian-threatening designs. ". . . there is a lot to be learned, and I do not think it pays to move off and begin to make arbitrary decisions on these designs, because we may do a poorer rather than a better job," Toms said.

Earlier in the hearing Dr. William Haddon, Jr., president of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety and former director of the agency now headed by Toms, pointed out the close parallels in design between military hardware — "the edges of swords, the points of spears, warclubs, tomahawks, battering rams, the prows of triremes" — and the front-end designs of some contemporary cars. Since the damage-producing characteristics of such designs have been long known, he points out, "it can hardly be maintained that using the same lethal shapes for the surfaces of vehicles that can and regularly do impact pedestrians, bicyclists and other defenseless road users may be excused as an act in ignorance." Haddon reminded the Committee that in its own records was a copy of a 1968 letter sent by him as safety bureau director to auto and truck makers urging their greater attention to "structure-injury relationships" between vehicles and struck pedestrians.

'THE AUTO STYLISTS KEEL-HAULING TEST'

Nearly ten years ago, in a presentation to the Fifth Stapp Crash Conference, Henry H. Wakeland warned that it is "imperative that we make headway in passenger car design if we are to influence the largest portion of the fatalities" occurring to pedestrians.

Wakeland was then an automotive consultant in New York State. Today, he is director of the Bureau of Surface Transportation Safety in the National Transportation Safety Board.

Wakeland proposed a novel direct way of minimizing exterior-protrusion hazards on new cars — a test that "provides the automobile designer with a personal basis for judgment of the importance of ornaments and the need for preventing local injury (to struck pedestrians). The test is completely non-hazardous. It may be called the Automobile Stylists Keel-Hauling Test after its similarity to a procedure once used in the British Navy."

The test calls for the "responsible person" styling the car to be drawn slowly across its surfaces by ropes attached to his wrists. The designer, protected only by "light summer clothing," is "able to stop the test and make design correction for local injury sources when he considers changes desirable." Such a testing method — similar to those "performed by the American public daily without supervision or cogent observation for more than 40 years" — might "produce design corrections very quickly" in auto exteriors, Wakeland suggested.

It is not believed that any foreign or domestic auto manufacturer has yet adopted Wakeland's 10-year-old test suggestion in its auto styling procedure.

NEW EFFORT SOUGHT IN FORD CONTROL ARM INVESTIGATION

An auto safety advocate has demanded that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration renew its "field investigation" of Ford lower control arm failures.

Lowell Dodge, director of the Center for Auto Safety, stated in a letter to Acting NHTSA Administrator Douglas Toms that the safety administration's investigation of Ford lower control arm failures has been "grossly insufficient."

Since last fall Consumers Union and the Center have sent the safety administration "a steady stream of letters from consumers complaining of defective lower control arms," Dodge said.

He demanded "a specific response" to the Center's queries as to how many of those complaints have been investigated and how many have been confirmed by the safety administration as actual control arm failures.

Dodge told Toms that the consumer letters which the Center has sent to the safety administration strengthen "the view that a full recall of affected vehicles is the only justifiable course."

Ford control arm failures were first brought to public attention in June 1970 when the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety released a report that was prompted by failures experienced in a Baltimore County police fleet. At the urging of the Department of Transportation, Ford Motor Company agreed to recall 85,000 police pursuit vehicles in August 1970. (See Status Report, Vol. 5, No. 15, Sept. 1, 1970.)

TEST CENTER CERTAIN AS BILL ENTERS CONFERENCE

The House and Senate have both agreed to give the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration \$9.6 million to construct its own compliance test facility.

Pending final outcome of a joint House-Senate conference to resolve funding level differences for other NHTSA programs, the safety administration has the go-ahead to construct the long awaited test facility that was mandated by the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966 — but for which sufficient funds have not been provided by the Congress until now.

The safety administration's request for funds to construct the compliance test facility was strongly supported in testimony presented by the American Mutual Insurance Alliance and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety before both House and Senate Appropriations Committees.

Although the House and Senate voted to meet the Nixon Administration's full budget request for a compliance test facility, they differed on the amount to be apportioned to NHTSA for traffic and highway safety programs.

NHTSA had requested \$76.8 million to finance fiscal year 1972 motor vehicle safety programs and highway safety research, development and demonstration projects. The House cut that request by \$14 million while the Senate-passed appropriations bill cut the budget request by only \$1 million.

A substantial part of the safety administration's budget request is earmarked for its Alcohol Safety Action Projects (ASAP) program. It requested funds to support 40 such projects in fiscal year 1972. However, the House-passed version of the bill would provide funds for only the 29 ASAP projects now in existence. (See related story on page 6.)

The Senate-passed version of the appropriations bill would provide funds for all 40 projects planned by NHTSA. The Senate committee report further "directs that the program not be limited in scope but that projects be implemented in all States as soon as possible."

For programs under the 16 National Highway Safety Standards, the safety administration requested an \$80 million obligation ceiling for federal aid to state and community highway safety programs (Sec. 402 and Sec. 403). The House passed a \$75 million limit. However, the Senate voted to delete the House-imposed obligation ceiling. Should the Senate version of the bill prevail in House-Senate conference, NHTSA would be able to operate, at least, at its \$80 million request level.

Both House and Senate voted \$47 million for liquidation of previously incurred Section 402 and 403 contract obligations. Of that amount, \$6 million will come from the Highway Trust Fund. NHTSA had requested \$57 million to liquidate the obligations.

The safety administration's request for 100 additional personnel was approved by the Senate. However, the House-passed version of the appropriations bill provided for only 40 new NHTSA positions.

Differences in the House and Senate versions of the bill will be settled in House-Senate conference this week.

WALLER SEES DANGER IN 'OVERSIMPLIFICATION'

A leading researcher into the abusive drinking-driving problem has cautioned that attributing half of the nation's highway losses to the "problem drinker" is an "oversimplification" that is "asking for trouble."

Dr. Julian Waller, chairman of the American Association for Automotive Medicine's Committee on Alcohol and Drugs, writes in the current issue of the organization's magazine, "Quarterly," that alcohol's relationship to highway losses has become "grossly muddled" by attributing most alcohol related losses to the problem drinker.

". . . data currently available identify at least three groups -- not one -- that contribute excessively to crashes involving alcohol," Waller said. He identi-

fied the groups as: "problem drinkers," "heavy social drinkers" and "teenagers impaired by small amounts of alcohol."

"Alcohol is involved in half of the fatal highway crashes, but not all those with alcohol are drivers or are problem drinkers," Waller warns. "Problem drinkers contribute to an estimated one-third (about 18,000) of all highway fatalities (and thus two-thirds of the approximately 28,000 fatalities annually involving alcohol). Heavy social drinkers, and teenagers impaired by small amounts of alcohol together contribute to approximately another 15 per cent (about 9,000) of all fatalities (and thus about one-third of the fatalities involving alcohol)," Waller estimates.

The Department of Transportation's Alcohol Safety Action Program (ASAP) is "being promoted as an action program aimed predominantly at drivers who are problem drinkers and who are characterized as sick individuals," he notes.

Waller's AAAM committee believes that DOT's current alcohol countermeasures program has a "greater likelihood of success" than past programs which "either have not been evaluated or have been proven ineffective through appropriate evaluation." However, he warns that, "If the program expands too rapidly . . . evaluation (of countermeasure projects) will not be possible and we will be right back to selling unknown cures of undetermined value for poorly diagnosed diseases."

With respect to alcoholism Waller stresses that, "The disease concept has been widely misinterpreted as absolving the individual entirely from responsibility for his actions because he has a disease." The concept should be applied, he says, "exactly the same way as it is applied to other entities. Nobody absolves the person with heart disease, epilepsy, diabetes, chronic obstructive respiratory disease or any of the myriad other conditions if he does not participate actively in following the prescribed medical regimen Both professional assistance and patient cooperation are required."

DOT EXPANDS ASAP PROGRAM

The Department of Transportation has expanded its Alcohol Safety Action Projects (ASAP) program with federal funding of 20 new state and local alcohol countermeasures projects.

This brings the number of federally funded alcohol countermeasure projects in the country to 29. The safety administration characterizes the program as "a variety of intergovernmental activities to identify drunk drivers; make decisions concerning their driving, and initiate treatment and rehabilitation efforts where applicable."

According to Acting NHTSA Administrator Douglas Toms, "Our focus is upon the problem drinker-driver, the social drinker who drives while intoxicated, and the inexperienced young driver who combines heavy drinking with driving."

DOT has now committed more than \$60 million to be spent over a 3½ year period on alcohol countermeasure projects, according to a safety administration announcement. "The federal funding of each of the new projects averages about \$2.2 million," the announcement noted.

The new projects are being established in New Hampshire and South Dakota; Phoenix, Ariz.; Columbus, Ga.; Indianapolis, Ind.; Wichita, Kan.; New Orleans, La.; Baltimore, Md.; Boston, Mass.; Kansas City, Mo.; Lincoln, Neb.; Cincinnati, Ohio; Oklahoma City, Okla.; San Antonio, Tex.; Richland Co., S. C.; Hennepin Co., Minn.; Cumberland and York Counties, Me.; Fairfax Co., Va.; Pulaski Co., Ark., and Hillsborough Co., Fla.

Federally funded ASAP projects begun last year are in operation in nine other locations. (See Status Report, Vol. 5, No. 11, July 7, 1970.)

DOT SIGNS ESV CONTRACT WITH FORD

The Department of Transportation has signed a one dollar contract with Ford Motor Company for an experimental safety vehicle. Ford had bid \$6.8 million on the same contract last year.

The company's earlier bid was rejected by the government in favor of bids submitted by American Machine and Foundry Company (\$3.2 million), Fairchild Hiller Corporation (\$4.5 million) and General Motors Corporation (one dollar). (See Status Report, Vol. 5, No. 11, July 7, 1970.)

According to Ford, the company has been working on "its own safety-car program" since the government refused its earlier bid on the ESV contract. The company said it decided to enter into a contract with the government because, "The Department of Transportation has stated it will rely heavily on information developed through these contracts to write future safety standards. We want very much to have our contributions included in the body of knowledge to be drawn upon when such standards are written."

● NOTICE ●

Due to staff vacations Status Report will be published on Aug. 16, 1971, and Sept. 7, 1971. Regular bi-weekly publication will resume on Sept. 20, 1971.

NEW FILM AVAILABLE — A new film, "Your Money's Worth of Car," dealing with the need for cars that can withstand crashes at low speeds and calling for mass consumer support in the campaign for sturdier cars, has been released by Harvest Films, Inc.

Produced for State Farm Insurance Companies, the 13 minute, color film combines research footage of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety's low speed crash tests with information showing consumers how crashes at low speeds needlessly pick their pockets.

The film was written and directed by Leo Trachtenberg, president of Harvest Films, and is available for free loan distribution through Modern Talking Picture Service, Inc., 2323 New Hyde Park Road, New Hyde Park, N.Y. 11040.

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INSURANCE INSTITUTE for HIGHWAY SAFETY

WATERGATE SIX HUNDRED

600 NEW HAMPSHIRE AVENUE, N.W. • WASHINGTON, D. C. 20037

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