

Congress Cuts NHTSA Spending

The Congress has recessed through Labor Day, leaving NHTSA with \$15 million less than it had last year for state and community programs, no appropriations for motor vehicle safety programs, and instructions to go ahead with plans to reprogram \$9 million that was appropriated two years ago to build the agency's compliance test facility.

Just prior to summer recess, the Congress passed and sent to the White House appropriations for NHTSA and FHWA highway loss reduction activities for fiscal year 1974.

This is the first time in the agency's seven-year history that the Congress has failed to increase NHTSA's budget — and in fact has curtailed federal highway loss reduction spending.

STATE AND COMMUNITY SPENDING

The area hardest hit by the budget cut is the state and community matching grant program (Section 403). The program is jointly administered by NHTSA and FHWA. Last year the agencies had \$95 million for that program. About 10 per cent of the funds went to FHWA for administration of the three highway standards under its jurisdiction; the balance was used by NHTSA to aid states in implementing the 15 highway standards under its jurisdiction. (\$10 million of that was for the FARE program, which officials describe as "a one shot deal" of paying overtime for extra traffic enforcement at high accident locations.) NHTSA had asked for \$90.2 million this year. The Congress appropriated \$80 million.

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COMPLIANCE TEST FACILITY

Since 1966 the Congress has expressed varying degrees of interest in seeing that NHTSA have its own compliance test facility. The Congress has mandated the construction of the facility and in 1972 it appropriated \$9 million for that purpose. Earlier this year the President impounded that money.

In its budget request for fiscal year 1974, NHTSA asked for authority to spend

that \$9 million on other loss reduction programs. During appropriation hearings, Acting Administrator James E. Wilson told the House Appropriations Committee's Transportation Subcommittee that now the facility "is not scheduled for construction earlier than fiscal year 1975." The Congress directed that the funds it had earmarked earlier for the facility be spent on other research and development projects.

MOTOR VEHICLE PROGRAM

The appropriations package that the Congress sent to the President had no money earmarked for motor vehicle program. NHTSA had requested \$35.1 million — a \$2.1 million increase over last year. The Congress was unable to set fiscal 1974 appropriations for NHTSA's motor vehicle program because a bill that would authorize a spending ceiling for the program is tied up in the House Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee. Once the matter of spending ceiling is settled, NHTSA will ask the appropriations committee for money to fund the program. Until then, the agency will continue to operate on a "continuing resolution" at the level established last year.

In millions, the following chart compares NHTSA's fiscal year 1974 Congressionally approved spending level with its 1974 budget request and its 1973 spending level:

	FY 1973 Spending Level	FY 1974 Budget Request	FY 1974 Approved by Congress
Motor Vehicle Program	33	35.1	deferred
Research and Development (Section 403)	44.2	41.9	38.8 ¹
Consumer Information and Cost Savings Act Implementation ²		15	15
State and Community (Section 402)	95 ³	90.2	80

¹ Includes \$9 million previously earmarked for compliance test facility.

² \$2 million spent in FY 1973 was diverted from other programs.

³ \$10 million expended for FARE program.

Leach Joins IIHS

H. James Leach, a mechanical engineer, has joined the operations staff of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. He was formerly a staff engineer with Exotech Systems, Inc. where he worked with potential applications of technology to identification of drivers with revoked or suspended licenses.

Leach has a B.S. and a M.E. in mechanical engineering from Cornell University.

GM Infant Carrier Sales Soar

Since the first of this year, sales of General Motors's Infant Carriers have skyrocketed. In the first seven months of this year the auto maker sold 63 per cent more infant restraint devices than it did during the previous four years.

GM sold only 98,000 Infant Carriers from 1969, when the device was introduced, through 1972. In the first seven months of 1973 alone, the auto maker sold 155,435 of the infant restraining devices. During that period GM conducted an advertising campaign for its car seats.

Chrysler and Ford had comparatively light child and infant seat sales during the same period, according to company spokesmen. Those two manufacturers have made what Lowell Dodge, director of the Center for Auto Safety, calls "token efforts" to promote their child and infant seats.

In April of this year, GM began advertising its Infant Carriers and its Child Love Seats, for older children. So far the effort has consisted of nine "prime time" ad showings and seven daytime showings. The auto maker has also purchased ads in *Reader's Digest*, *TV Guide* and 10 "women and special interest magazines," according to a company spokesman.

Shortly, the auto maker will expand its marketing effort to major retail stores across the country and through special mail order arrangements with some auto clubs, a company executive told *Status Report*. Currently, the seats are available only from GM dealers and by mail from the manufacturer.

The GM seats will also soon be provided by some car rental agencies, the GM spokesman said. In June the Center for Auto Safety urged in letters to major car rental agencies that they provide child car seats to customers who requested them. To date the Center has received two responses. Hertz has agreed to offer them "on an experimental basis . . . whenever an advance request is made." Hertz said this offer will apply only to Hertz-owned offices and not to franchise agencies that use the Hertz name. Econo-Car responded that the Center's suggestion "is a good one," but reasoned that since there is a "lack in demand" such a move would be a "useless investment." However, the company said it would discuss the suggestion with its franchise holders' advisory group. Sol Edidin, executive director of CATRALA, the leasing industry's trade association, told *Status Report* that Avis and National auto leasing companies plan to make child and infant restraints available "on request." The companies do not plan to advertise the new service, Edidin said.

Allstate Deflates GM Air Bag Study

A General Motors study purporting to show that lap-shoulder belt systems are more effective than air bags in reducing fatal injuries in crashes "must be disregarded," John S. Trees, a vice president of Allstate Insurance Co., says.

"The conclusions reached in the study have to be almost entirely discounted," Trees told a Senate probe into the status of air bag technology.

Trees criticized the validity of the results on two major points:

- The basic approach, which involved using the subjective opinions of four GM employees in evaluating the systems as a jury, was not validated. In the study, the four employees were asked to evaluate individual accident reports and estimate the percentage chance of survival with each restraint system.
- The 706 fatalities chosen for study were unrepresentative of occupant fatalities generally.

“Until these apparent major deficiencies in the study are corrected or are explained to the satisfaction of professional researchers,” Trees said, “we believe it is a disservice to the field of safety to use or refer to the report results.”

On the basis of its study, GM recently urged the Department of Transportation to delay “indefinitely” its requirement for passive restraint protection in 1976-model cars in order to allow GM to “determine the best system or combination of systems to be offered as an alternate to the combined lap-shoulder belt with a starter interlock; it may be the air cushion or a combination of air cushion and lap belt,” GM President Edward Cole told Transportation Secretary Claude S. Brinegar in a letter. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 8, No. 14, July 10, 1973.)

About half the data base of the GM study came from Multi-Disciplinary Accident Investigation reports of the U.S. Department of Transportation, which are not a representative sample and not randomly selected, Trees said. A DOT staff member responsible for administering the crash investigation program recently warned that their cases “do not have statistical validity.” (See *Status Report*, Vol. 8, No. 14, July 10, 1973.)

Trees pointed out that the balance of the cases in the GM report came from GM’s Motors Insurance Corp. Trees said:

“Motors Insurance Corp. only writes physical damage coverages which includes the collision coverage and does not write auto liability coverages. This would have a biasing effect on the data.

“Many insureds when hit by an at fault driver pursue recovery from the other party’s company and do not report the accident to their company which carries the collision coverage. To the degree that this occurs, the study would be overrepresented by single car accidents and other type accidents where the driver was at fault since it was in these cases the insured would always collect from his collision coverage.”

Trees also challenged the GM study’s statement that lap belt usage is approaching 45 per cent in current model cars.

“The only scientifically structured study that we know of that tests seat belt usage in cars with buzzer-light systems was conducted by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety,” Trees said. “In this study, people were observed as they used their cars and it was found that there was an 18 per cent usage in cars with the buzzer-light system and a 16 per cent usage in other cars which was not statistically significant, indicating that the buzzer-light system did not increase seat belt usage.”

DOT Extends Rules To Federal Agencies

The Department of Transportation has put some 141 federal agencies – including some of its own – on notice that they will have to start complying with the same highway safety program standards that apply to the states.

Starting Aug. 15, 1973, the standards will become applicable to federal agencies. More than half a million vehicles and 46,000 miles of paved roads and streets under federal jurisdiction have been legally exempt from the standards.

Last August, *Status Report* detailed the lack of federal agency compliance with DOT's highway safety program standards. (See Vol. 7, No. 15, Aug. 21, 1972.) In October, DOT proposed that all appropriate federal agencies bring their highway related programs into compliance with the standards. Interested parties were invited to comment.

In their comments on the standards, several agencies complained of "budgetary problems" and "particular program difficulties relating to their activities," the agency said when it announced the move. It cited, as one example, the Department of Defense, which "raised questions relating to the applicability of Standard No. 7, Traffic Courts, to unit commanders' on-base authority under the Uniform Code of Military Justice." Standard No. 7 establishes guidelines for traffic courts that are substantially different than those set forth in military law.

In some cases "flexibility in implementation" of the standards is necessary where federal agencies are concerned, DOT said when it announced the move. The "best way to ensure a meaningful implementation of the highway safety program standards in federally administered areas is to review the standards on a program-by-program basis with each agency," DOT said.

The federal agencies will be required to report to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Federal Highway Administration on their "planned efforts" for implementing the standards. Annual progress reports will also be required.

NC Data Cast Doubt On Habitual Offender Role

Researchers at the University of North Carolina have concluded that accident prevention countermeasures directed at so-called habitual offenders "cannot bring about large reductions in total accidents."

The study demonstrates "once again that automobile accidents are not a very predictable phenomenon," said researchers J. Richard Stewart and B. J. Campbell in summarizing their findings.

Their study involved accident and violation records of 2,502,240 North Carolina drivers for each of four years beginning with December, 1966, through November, 1970. The four year period was divided into two intervals of two years each. Accident and violation records from the first two-year period were compared with accident and violation records from the second two-year period. (Records for 368,025 drivers who were 21 years old at the end of the study period were divided into two one-year periods.)

Data reported in the study were taken from the North Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles' driver license file. The state requires reporting of all crashes involving injury and/or more than two hundred dollars property damage. The study does not include indications of crash severity.

The purpose of the study was to investigate "the relationships between accidents and violations over two consecutive time intervals," the researchers said.

They found that the "previous violation record of a driver is not a good predictor of his future accident involvement." Their report points out that "of the 324,077 accidents occurring during the last two years of the study period 229,831 or 70.92 per cent of them involved drivers who had *no* (emphasis, in each case, in original) violations during the preceding two year period. Thus, 71 per cent of *all* of accidents

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in the second time period were accounted for by people with *no* recorded offenses the previous two years — the very people who would be assumed to have a clean record later. Moreover, about 70 per cent of the drivers having *four or more violations* in the *first* two years had no accidents in the *second* two years.”

Previous accident records seem to be only “a slightly better predictor of accidents in the sense of identifying groups of drivers with relatively high likelihoods of being involved in future accidents.” The data show “that 4,664 drivers [a fifth of one per cent of the total] had three or more accidents in the first two years, and these drivers had 2,498 accidents [three quarters of one per cent of all accidents] in the second two years; 711 drivers had four or more accidents in the first period (0.03 per cent), and they accounted for 524 accidents in the second period (0.16 per cent) Again, as in the case of prior violations, the vast majority of accidents (80.54 per cent) in the second time period involved drivers who showed *no* accident symptoms during the first two year period.”

The researchers caution that “if a very stringent suppressive program were brought to bear on drivers with a violation record in the previous time period, one has to face the consequences of the fact that the majority of this group are drivers who in fact would have clean accident records in the future.

“This is somewhat analogous to a situation in which all persons found guilty are subjected to stringent treatment despite the fact that more than half were in fact innocent. This kind of ratio is generally unacceptable to people in the context of a punitive program”

“Accident repeaters are a small but important part of the overall problem. They deserve attention through ingenious and cost-effective programs. It should be realized, however, that countermeasures directed at the violation and accident repeater cannot bring about large reductions in total accidents but can bring about small and important gains,” the North Carolina researchers said.

In an earlier report of North Carolina crash data, Campbell was critical of the “belief that the repeater is the main source of trouble on the streets and highways It is wrong to lead people to believe that by concentrating chiefly on the accident repeater we will make substantial inroads on the problems of traffic safety in North Carolina or the nation.” (See *Status Report*, Vol. 6, No. 13, July 12, 1971.)

Copies of Stewart’s and Campbell’s study, entitled *The Statistical Association Between Past and Future Accidents and Violations*, are available for \$1.00 each from the Highway Safety Research Center, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 27514.

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the highway
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