

**Comments of Peter Speer
Immediate Past President, American Traffic Safety Service Association
To Congressman Brian Baird**

Congressman Baird, thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's transportation roundtable. I appreciate this opportunity to talk to you about a key element in today's transportation debate: infrastructure safety.

My name is Pete Speer and I'm here today on behalf of ATSSA – the American Traffic Safety Services Association.

ATSSA members manufacture and install roadway safety devices and features including signs, pavement markings, guardrail, crash cushions, and just about everything orange that you see in a work zone. About 700 of our members are from public agencies. We deal with intelligent transportation systems and safety and public awareness issues. In short, we are involved in all aspects of the infrastructure side of roadway safety. ATSSA's core purpose is to "*Advance Roadway Safety.*"

We propose that a Toward Zero Fatalities vision be the focus of the 2009 reauthorization of SAFETEA-LU. Federal, state, and local governments must unite with private industry towards a single overarching goal – *To annually reduce fatalities until there are no deaths on America's roadways.* To this end, ATSSA has developed a comprehensive reauthorization proposal of our own that I'd like to share with you and your staff.

You asked that we speak to elements of the Policy and Revenue Commission's final report. I will briefly discuss the areas of the commission report that we feel are critical to the reauthorization process. But first, I'd like to publicly commend the Commissioners for their almost 2 years of hard work. ATSSA was a proud sponsor of one of the Commission's listening sessions. While ATSSA may not agree with every component of their report – we are grateful for their efforts in moving the debate in a positive direction.

It is apparent to me that the Commission understood the importance of safety to the future of our transportation system. The report states – “users of our surface transportation systems must not be at risk of death or injury due to unsafe facilities or operations”.

We strongly agree with this statement.

I'd like to now speak to some specific areas of the report:

- The Commission calls for a collapsing of federal surface transportation programs and targeting investment to 10 core areas. One of the 10 new program areas is titled: Saving Lives: A National Safe Mobility Program. While we are pleased that there is a strong recognition of the federal role related to infrastructure safety and that one of the suggested core areas is related to safety, we do have some concerns. The creation of the Highway Safety Improvement Program – or HSIP – in SAFETEA-LU was a priority for ATSSA. In fact, our reauthorization policy calls for strengthening the HSIP and providing additional funding for the program

in the future. With the creation of the HSIP - for the first time - the federal-aid transportation program had a core element devoted to safety. We do not want to take a step back from this progress.

We would want to see the details of this new National Safe Mobility Program to ensure that the role of infrastructure roadway safety would not be diluted in the future planning and construction of highway projects. In addition, the report seems to focus most of the attention on the behavioral side to the safety question. While we do not argue that increasing seatbelt usage, reducing BAC and enhanced enforcement play a role in reducing traffic fatalities, ATSSA strongly believes an emphasis on cost-effective roadway safety improvements can be just as effective and we would not want to lose the ground gained with the creation of the HSIP program. We believe that the price of driver error should not be death.

- Fifty-four percent of traffic fatalities nationwide occur on rural roads. In fact, run-off road fatalities are designated as a target area in most state strategic highway safety plans. The majority of run-off road accidents occur on two-lane rural roads.

We are pleased that the Commission recognized the unique challenge in meeting the transportation needs in rural areas. Another of the 10 investment areas suggested by the Commission is called: Connecting America: A National Access Program for Smaller Cities and Rural Areas. We do not know the details behind such a program, but would hope there would be recognition of the benefits to be had from roadway safety infrastructure improvements on rural roadways. This is where most of the fatalities in the country occur. ATSSA is a strong supporter of the High Risk Rural Roads Program created in SAFETEA-LU and we recommend increased funding for this program in the future.

- We were pleased to see the commission recommend a federal fuel tax increase. ATSSA has recommended a fuel tax increase as well as an indexing of the tax into the future. There is no doubt that for the next reauthorization – and probably further into the future – the federal fuel tax is the best way to raise the revenue we need to improve our transportation system. It is true that the federal fuel tax may not be sustainable in the long-term – we have a perverse scenario where we are encouraging folks to use less fossil fuels -- while at the same time, we fund our transportation system based upon the sale of fossil fuels. But, suffice it to say – we are not going to be able to transition to another type of funding system in the near future.

I would also like to remind everyone that the Highway Trust Fund is facing a short-term crisis. Current estimates show a more than \$3 billion shortfall in the Highway Trust Fund beginning on October 1st – the actual amount will certainly be higher because of the dramatic recent reduction in vehicle miles traveled in this country due to high gas prices. Congressman Baird, we look forward to working with you as Congress tries to fix this short-term crisis.

- One area the Commission did not adequately address, in our opinion, is that of older drivers. By 2020, one of every five licensed drivers will be aged 65 or older – that proportion is expected to increase to one in every four licensed drivers by the year 2030.

Older adults face different challenges when it comes to driving. Research has shown that as we age, we experience physical changes that can make driving more difficult. The Federal Highway Administration has developed a series of recommendations for roadway improvements designed to accommodate the needs of older drivers. ATSSA supports the work of FHWA and is asking Congress to provide \$90 million per year during the next reauthorization to fund pilot projects across the country to implement those recommendations. Roadway improvements designed to address the needs of older drivers have the added benefit of aiding all drivers, regardless of age.

- The Commission report focuses on the need to streamline the project delivery process and the need for performance-based, data driven decisions. ATSSA supports the need for improving the project delivery system. As for the need to have solid data in order to ensure sound investment decisions, we agree. In the ATSSA reauthorization policy, we call for the use of Roadway Safety Audits as a tool to plan safety countermeasures and effectively utilize scarce resources. In addition, ATSSA recommends standardized collection and reporting of fatality and crash data in order to better design countermeasures to make the roadway safer. We also recommend that the Secretary of Transportation be directed to conduct a study of the “return on investment” of a variety of roadway safety features and devices so that state and local governments may make well informed safety investments.

In conclusion, Congressman Baird, there is much more to the ATSSA reauthorization proposal than what I’ve had a chance to mention here. I hope we can work with you and your staff in the coming months in order to structure the federal programs in a manner that will improve the safety of this nation’s vast road network. I appreciate the opportunity to share our views and look forward to your questions.