



U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure  
Subcommittee on Highways and Transit

Hon. Eleanor Holmes Norton, Chair  
Hon. Rodney Davis, Ranking Member

Testimony of  
Mrs. Cindy Williams, Member, Board of Directors  
American Traffic Safety Services Association

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Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, Chair Norton, Ranking Member Davis, Rep. Westerman and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Cindy Williams, and I am President of Time Striping, Inc. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to talk about the important topic of reducing roadway fatalities and serious injuries in this country. Time Striping, Inc. has been in business since 1988 and we proudly make roads safer through the installation of pavement markings, traffic signs, guardrail and the management of roadway work zones. We are located in Van Buren, Arkansas, and I am a constituent of Congressman Westerman.

I am testifying today in my role as a member of the Board of Directors of the American Traffic Safety Services Association (ATSSA). Incorporated in 1970, ATSSA is an international trade association focused on advancing roadway safety. Our members manufacture, distribute, and install roadway safety infrastructure devices such as guardrail and cable barrier, traffic signs and signals, pavement markings and high friction surface treatments, and work zone safety devices, among many others. ATSSA was the first non-governmental organization to adopt a Towards Zero Deaths vision and ATSSA members are committed to making zero fatalities a reality nationwide.

Tragically, reaching zero fatalities remains a serious challenge. From 2017 to 2019, progress was made to reduce the roadway fatality rate. But we have now watched those improvements come to an end. Despite the best efforts of ATSSA members, the broader construction industry, state departments of transportation (state DOTs) and local transportation agencies represented by my colleagues on this panel, the United States has been experiencing steady increases in fatalities and serious injuries over recent years. Just last month, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimated that almost 43,000 people died on roadways across the country in 2021. This is an unacceptable increase of 10.5 percent from the prior year.<sup>1</sup>

Everyone in this room and on this panel recognizes the severity of the current roadway safety crisis. But recognizing the problem is just the first step. Collectively, we need to work together to identify actions we can take now to address this crisis – while working to develop new solutions for the future. Bringing together all stakeholders to chart a path forward is critical to making our roads safer and today’s hearing provides us with an opportunity to share experiences and ideas on how to do so. ATSSA’s expertise is providing vital roadway safety infrastructure improvements and we are determined to work together with our private and public sector partners to save lives.

An important aspect of a safe systems approach to roadway safety is recognizing that as humans, we make mistakes on the road. That is a fact. We need to recognize this reality and make the necessary roadway improvements so that these mistakes do not result in the loss of life or serious injury. We applaud Secretary Pete Buttigieg’s launch of the National Roadway Safety Strategy which, for the first time, publicly affirms the U.S. government’s goal of zero fatalities. Having the same long-term goal is an excellent step forward to tackling this increasing challenge.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) will play an important role in allowing states and local governments to make these kinds of roadway safety infrastructure investments. The IIJA provides nearly \$30 billion over the next five years for roadway safety projects. By providing these significant increases

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<sup>1</sup> National Highway Traffic Safety Administration:  
<https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813298>

in funding for roadway safety, I believe we can start to reverse the increases in roadway fatalities and serious injuries. I would like to highlight a few of these important programs.

### **Highway Safety Improvement Program**

The Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) is a critical component to achieving the goal of Towards Zero Deaths. Created in the SAFETA-LU legislation in 2005, it is a federal formula program that provides dedicated safety funds annually to each state DOT. The IIJA significantly increased funding for the HSIP by providing \$15.6 billion over the next five years, plus an additional \$1.2 billion for rail-highway grade crossings. Having a dedicated funding stream for roadway safety has been critical to addressing safety needs and continuing this program was a bipartisan priority for Congress and ATSSA.

We remain concerned that while traffic fatalities continue to rise, both the IIJA and previous transportation authorizations allow states to transfer their HSIP funds to other core Federal-Aid Highway programs. We understand that this is not something likely to change before the expiration of the IIJA. However, Congress should encourage states to address safety issues and consider ensuring that congressionally-approved safety funds are being used for safety projects.

### **Safe Streets and Roads for All Program**

The IIJA also includes the Safe Streets and Roads for All Program. This discretionary grant program will provide \$1 billion each year to metropolitan planning organizations, local and Tribal governments to help prevent roadway deaths and serious injuries. As the name of the program implies, it is intended to address not just safety for the motorist but for other users of the transportation system such as pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorcyclists. By providing funding for planning and implementation of roadway safety strategies, this program will be an important tool for communities looking to address and improve safety outcomes.

### **Rural Road Safety**

As we look to improve roadway safety, we need to remember the rural areas of the country. According to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, 19 percent of Americans live in rural areas, yet 43 percent of all roadway fatalities occur on rural roads. This means the fatality rate on rural roads is nearly two times greater than of that on urban roads. Additionally, the fatality rate on rural interstates increased 15 percent over 2020 statistics.<sup>2</sup> The rural road network carries not just passenger vehicle traffic, but according to the U.S. Department of Transportation, nearly 50 percent of all truck vehicle miles traveled occur on rural roadways.<sup>3</sup> This combination creates its own unique safety challenges.

The IIJA includes a new Rural Surface Transportation Grant Program funded at \$2 billion over five years to be used, in part, to address safety needs in rural areas. Of that \$2 billion, 15 percent, or \$300 million, is reserved for recipients to address rural roadway fatalities due to lane departure. This is the first time that Congress has included dedicated rural roadway safety funding in transportation authorization legislation since the 2005 SAFETEA-LU law.

The IIJA also includes a new Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program funded at \$350 million over five years to focus on reducing wildlife-vehicle crashes. Preventing these kinds of incidents is important in many rural areas of the country.

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<sup>2</sup> Bureau of Transportation Statistics: <https://www.bts.gov/rural>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Transportation: <https://www.transportation.gov/rural>

During the pandemic, there was a noticeable increase in risky driving behavior due in part to higher driving speeds – especially in rural areas. One countermeasure that has proven to be effective at dramatically decreasing the distance needed to stop a speeding vehicle is high friction surface treatments (HFST). This is an aggregate application on top of the pavement which increases the friction of the roadway and can help prevent a vehicle from losing control when speed is a factor. Typically used at intersections and dangerous curves, HFST is proven to reduce stopping distances and reduce wet crashes by 83 percent and total crashes by 57 percent.<sup>4</sup>

The use of cable barrier, especially on a systemic basis, can dramatically reduce crashes and fatalities. When installed in the median of a divided highway, this application can reduce crossover crashes and fatalities. According to the Federal Highway Administration, 8 percent of fatalities on divided highways result from head-on crashes. When median barrier is installed on rural, four-lane freeways, it has resulted in a 97 percent reduction in cross-median crashes.<sup>5</sup>

We strongly believe that state DOTs are critical to assisting local governments in effectively deploying much-needed safety countermeasures. Often rural roads are owned by local governments, who may not have the technical expertise and resources to combat safety challenges. Therefore, state DOTs are important partners, and we encourage a collaborative approach to addressing safety needs. Because Highway Safety Improvement Program funds can be used on all public roads, not just state-owned ones, this kind of collaboration will bring people together to tackle rising fatalities at both the state and local level.

### **Work Zone Safety**

Vulnerable road users (VRUs) are a focus area in the IJJA. However, often overlooked VRUs are roadway construction workers. I am here today to tell you firsthand that roadway workers are very much vulnerable road users. In 1998, one of my company's employees was working on a road in Mountain Home, Arkansas, removing a centerline stripe from the road. An elderly man, who claimed he didn't see the advanced warning signs, drove past the flaggers, clipped one worker on the shoulder, and drove straight on into our company's employee, killing him. That's an experience that, to this day, breaks my heart and recommits me and my company daily to our mission of zero deaths.

According to the National Work Zone Safety Information Clearinghouse, there were 857 fatalities in roadway work zones in 2020, up from 845 in 2019 and 757 in 2018.<sup>6</sup> Although the majority of these fatalities are vehicle occupants, the men and women working in work zones are consistently in the line of traffic. These situations are likely to be ever more present as the full investment of the IJJA takes effect.

Technology is coming online today which will greatly enhance the safety of workers and drivers alike leading up to and in work zones. As connected and automated vehicles (CAVs) become more and more prevalent, these vehicles must be able to interact with smart work zones so that catastrophic crashes between autonomous vehicles and roadway workers can be avoided. The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), Virginia Tech Transportation Institute (VTTI), Audi and others are working on a

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<sup>4</sup> Federal Highway Administration: [https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/roadway\\_dept/pavement\\_friction/high\\_friction/](https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/roadway_dept/pavement_friction/high_friction/)

<sup>5</sup> Federal Highway Administration: [https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/provencountermeasures/median\\_barrier.cfm#psc-footnote](https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/provencountermeasures/median_barrier.cfm#psc-footnote)

<sup>6</sup> National Work Zone Safety Information Clearinghouse: <https://workzonesafety.org/work-zone-data/>

pilot project that alerts drivers when they are entering a work zone and alerts roadway workers when a vehicle is nearby.<sup>7</sup>

Within the IIJA, Congress directs U.S. DOT to update the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) within 18 months and then regularly thereafter. We applaud this direction for a long overdue update, and strongly encourage U.S. DOT to finalize the update to the MUTCD as soon as possible, rather than waiting the full 18 months as allowed under the law.

### **Connected and Autonomous Vehicles**

ATSSA is the leading construction industry association focused on connected and automated vehicles (CAV). We recognize that the future will include this kind of technology and the time is now to be working collaboratively on developing a transportation network that is ready for the deployment of these vehicles.

In order to perform effectively, CAV systems require adequate pavement markings, traffic signs and upgraded traffic signals to be able to safely move passengers. Updating the transportation system with these kinds of improvements will not only prepare us for the future but can be helpful to the driving public today. For example, recent studies have indicated that wider pavement markings are beneficial to CAVs, as well as older human drivers. Additionally, CAVs and drivers today benefit from contrasted pavement markings, especially in areas of glare. These are simple safety improvements that can be deployed now, and they have the dual effect of making roads safer for human drivers as well as CAVs.

Studies aggregated by the Federal Highway Administration have indicated that if lane departure warning systems, which rely on pavement markings, were deployed in all vehicles, 13-22 percent of driver fatalities could have been prevented.<sup>8</sup> However, these types of vehicle safety improvements strongly rely on investments in roadway safety infrastructure.

According to data collected by the Federal Highway Administration, wider edge lines can reduce non-intersection, fatal, and injury crashes on rural, two-lane roads by up to 37 percent; reduce fatal and injury crashes on rural freeways by up to 22 percent; and according to a 2018 Idaho Transportation Department study, wider edge lines have a benefit cost ratio of 25:1.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, ongoing studies strongly suggest that 6-inch wide pavement markings are better detected by CAVs than traditional 4-inch wide markings.<sup>10</sup>

These are all examples of not only the issues we face in preparing for the technology of the future, but are also examples of where the construction industry, vehicle and technology manufacturers, state DOTs and local governments can work together to solve a mutual challenge.

### **Funding Federal Safety Projects**

Federal transportation programs rely on federal fuel taxes to provide revenue into the Highway Trust Fund (HTF). These taxes provide the majority of funding into the HTF and are critical to making the infrastructure investments Members of Congress and the public want.

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<sup>7</sup> Audi of America: <https://media.audiusa.com/en-us/releases/494>

<sup>8</sup> Federal Highway Administration: <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/research/safety/18035/18035.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Federal Highway Administration: <https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/provencountermeasures/wider-edge-lines.cfm#psc-footnote>

<sup>10</sup> Federal Highway Administration: <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/research/safety/18035/18035.pdf>

It is true that since 2005, spending out of the Highway Trust Fund has outpaced revenue into the HTF. This has meant billions of dollars has had to be transferred from the General Fund into the HTF to maintain spending levels. While ATSSA members are grateful for the funding included in the IJA, we remain very concerned about the lack of modernization of the current user fee system which pays for these investments. Federal fuel taxes are an excise tax – meaning they do not rise or fall based on the price of a gallon of diesel or gasoline but rather are a set per-gallon rate. The federal fuel taxes have not been increased since 1993. While I am not here to say that this tax should be raised immediately, I do believe that this country needs to figure out how we will pay for federal infrastructure programs in the future.

One idea that will not solve this problem, and in fact would create new ones, is a suspension of federal fuel taxes. We join many in the transportation industry to strongly oppose any effort to suspend these taxes, and we do so for multiple reasons:

1. It's very unlikely that the full tax of 18.4 cents, if suspended, would be passed along to the consumer.
2. When the suspension is lifted in January 2023 and the fuel taxes are reinstated, the public will view this as a new tax increase – making any reinstatement politically difficult.
3. Eliminating the main source of funding into the HTF will exacerbate the revenue shortfall noted earlier and would undercut the transportation investments states and local governments are currently planning to make across the country.

In order to provide a long-term funding solution for the HTF, Congress should use the next several years to analyze data on alternative user fee mechanisms, including vehicle miles traveled fees, to ensure that the concept of a Highway Trust Fund can continue to live on for decades to come.

Why is this a safety concern, and what does this have to do with rising traffic fatalities? Without a modernized user fee, the argument for having a dedicated trust fund for transportation construction projects, including roadway safety infrastructure projects, disappears. Without the dedicated user fee, you lose the HTF. Without the HTF, you lose the ability to enact multi-year transportation authorizations, and you lose any meaningful, strategic federal investment in roadway safety infrastructure projects.

### **Challenges**

The IJA invests historic levels of funding in roadway safety, but challenges loom and will prevent the full implementation of the infrastructure package, and thus, likely put lives at risk. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the construction industry was facing a workforce shortage that has been further exacerbated by multiple factors, including low unemployment, relaxed state drug laws, enhanced unemployment benefits during the height of the pandemic and the fact that road construction is hard work.

The roadway safety industry is also facing a significant shortage of materials that go into the very devices that save thousands of lives on U.S. roadways. A May 2022 survey of ATSSA manufacturer member companies found that 92 percent of respondents are experiencing shortages of raw materials, which is an increase from similar surveys in June 2021 and March 2021. Materials in short supply include metals, resins, electronic components, plastics, sheeting material and pavement marking materials,

among other items. Although improved from a survey a year ago, it is worrisome that 43 percent of ATSSA members expect to be unable to meet contractual obligations for safety projects.<sup>11</sup>

Another challenge impacting the maximum effectiveness of the IJA is the high rate of inflation. Because of increased costs due to inflation, fewer safety projects can be undertaken today than a year ago. If this rate continues, that reality will continue to exist for the life of the law and our ability to reduce roadway fatalities and serious injuries will be undermined.

As we look to address transportation safety, it is important to recognize that all of these issues are intertwined. It will be impossible for state DOTs and local governments to aggressively install proven countermeasures and plan for the future if we don't address the workforce and materials shortage, and the high rate of inflation. To put it plainly like we do in Arkansas, without fixing these issues, this country won't have the people or materials we need to save the lives of our family members, friends, neighbors and coworkers as they travel our roadways.

### **Conclusion**

The continued increase of traffic fatalities in the U.S. is incredibly tragic. As a safety professional, business owner and mother of young adult children, the numbers are unacceptable, and I know we can do better by working together. We are at an inflection point with safety from all angles, and this effort is going to take collaboration from safety stakeholders and investments at the federal, state, tribal, and local level. I know that I join my colleagues on this panel in confirming our commitment to getting the job done. It will take innovation, a willingness to learn from one another and the ability to look at improving roadway safety as a collective challenge. ATSSA members are ready to do what we do best - roll up our sleeves and get to work.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I look forward to working together to realize a shared vision of zero deaths on our roads. I look forward to answering your questions.

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<sup>11</sup> Special Report: ATSSA Raw Materials Update, May 2022:  
[https://www.atssa.com/Portals/0/Publications/RawMaterialsSurveySpecialReport\\_May2022.pdf](https://www.atssa.com/Portals/0/Publications/RawMaterialsSurveySpecialReport_May2022.pdf)