

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 6, 1975

Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES:

From the advent of the first gasoline-powered vehicles at the turn of the century through the next six decades, this country developed a vast, flexible form of transportation basic to its economy and way of life. This development was marked by a tremendous network of roads, highways and satellite facilities, by millions of vehicles, and by millions of drivers who drove them. It also was marred by tragedy as the numbers of accidents, injuries and deaths kept pace with the rising tide of traffic. In addition it was expensive, reaching an estimated 45-50 billion dollar annual cost to society by 1970 in wages lost, medical bills, legal fees and property damage, not to mention human suffering.

In 1966 the Congress enacted the Highway Safety and National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Acts which initiated a national traffic safety effort to curb the rising numbers of traffic accidents, injuries, and deaths and, ultimately, to reduce them. These reports describe some of the many and varied programs undertaken to this end, and respond to the reporting requirements in the Acts. The volume on motor vehicle safety includes the annual reports required by Title I of the Motor Vehicle Information and Cost Savings Act of 1972. The highway safety document contains information on projects initiated because of provisions in the Highway Safety Act of 1973.

It is not possible to assess the contribution of any single program to traffic safety, but the combination of safer cars, safer highways and better trained, better informed drivers is having a beneficial effect. The fatality rate (per 100 million miles driven) has been forced steadily downward from 5.7 in 1966 to 4.3 in 1973. Deaths to motor vehicle occupants leveled off in those years, despite substantial increases in numbers of vehicles and drivers on the roads, miles driven, higher speeds, greater per capita alcohol consumption, and other persistent factors adversely affecting the safety of the motoring public. Average days of bed disability also declined, indicating some lessening in the severity of injuries, which may be attributable to motor vehicle safety features. Improved highways are basic to traffic safety, as is demonstrated by differences in the fatality rates on the fully improved, versus relatively unimproved, portions of the Nation's highway system.

The effects of the fuel shortage and fuel conservation measures were the most publicized traffic safety development of 1974. The combination of reduced speeds, fewer miles driven and altered driving habits and attitudes is given primary credit for saving the lives of 9,550 motorists and pedestrians during the year. Of these factors, the Department of Transportation considers the lowered speed limit to be quite significant. Pedestrian fatalities which had been trending upward, dropped 17.8 percent in 1974 -- another bright side to fuel conservation. However, there has been a recent

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tendency for the situation to drift gradually back toward "normal." With enactment, and enforcement, of a national 55 mile per hour speed limit, a substantial portion of the beneficial aspects of the fuel shortage should continue.

We believe that the highway and motor vehicle safety programs which make up the national traffic safety effort will continue to have a positive effect, and merit the support of the Congress, of the States and communities, of industry and of a citizenry increasingly aware that their lives may well be at stake.

GERALD R. FORD

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