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COMMITTEE ON

TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE

SAM GRAVES, CHAIRMAN

PRESS RELEASE

Chairman Rouzer Opening Statement from Hearing on Roadway Safety

For Immediate Release: February 12, 2025

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Washington, D.C. – *Opening remarks, as prepared, of Highways and Transit Subcommittee Chairman David Rouzer (R-NC) from today's hearing, entitled "America Builds: A Review of Programs to Address Roadway Safety":*

Today's hearing continues the Subcommittee's efforts to improve highway safety through policy and program reviews within the Department of Transportation as we work towards reauthorizing our nation's surface transportation programs.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates nearly 41,000 people died in motor vehicle related crashes in 2023. While this was a 3.6 percent decrease from 2022, fatalities are still up compared to the last decade.

Driver behavior has changed considerably since 2020. After pandemic-era closures began in March of 2020, driving trips dropped by 60 percent and speeding risks increased by 64 percent. These risks have only increased as traffic enforcement declined after police officers were discouraged from "nonessential" contact and radical political movements called for defunding police forces across the country. This came to a head in 2021, when traffic fatalities jumped over 10 percent, the highest number of fatalities since 2005, and the largest percentage increase since 1975.

Today, car travel has returned to normal, but traffic enforcement hasn't. According to a New York Times report, traffic stops have declined as much as 91 percent in cities since 2020. Underfunded and understaffed police forces mean there are no real consequences for drivers' illegal actions and

have only paved the way for drivers to speed, drive while impaired, and make reckless decisions endangering others on the road.

We have also seen the increase in traffic fatalities disproportionately affecting our rural communities. In 2022, NHTSA found 40 percent of all traffic fatalities occurred in rural areas on non-interstate roads, despite only 20 percent of the population residing in these rural areas. Fatality rates remain one and a half times higher in rural areas than in urban areas.

Our rural roads often have more narrow lanes, limited shoulders, exposed hazards, and limited clear zones. Drivers tend to be riskier when there is less traffic and fewer traffic patterns that require slower speeds. Sixty-eight percent of our public roads are in rural areas and 77 percent of all roadways are maintained by local governments. The backlog for rural road and bridge maintenance was over \$180 billion in 2022.

States and local governments need flexibility to implement programs which address the shortfalls in our rural communities. States also need reliable, consistent programming, such as the Highway Safety Improvement Program, which addresses maintenance backlogs and ensures roads meet safety standards.

Our current and future road design standards can help drive down fatalities across our communities. Pavement and guardrail standards should adapt to new vehicle technology, such as electric vehicles, which weigh more than traditional vehicles. We should consider if updates to the design standards for guardrails are necessary to absorb the heavier weight and prevent these heavier vehicles from crossing the median into oncoming traffic.

We also need to continue to address work zone safety. Reckless driving puts our roadside workers at greater risk of injury or death. According to the Associated General Contractors of America, 64 percent of contractors reported a motor vehicle had crashed into their work zone since 2020. This number is unacceptable. Again, our enforcement can discourage reckless driving in work zones, but we can also look at ways to better design work zones and related traffic patterns to curtail these incidents.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today, who will be able to share what's working, what's not, and how we can continue to make our roadways safer. We don't have unlimited funds, and it's crucial we make strategic investments that are proven to save lives.

Click [here](#) for more information, including video and witness testimony.

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