

U.S. Senator Gary Peters

**Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
Subcommittee on Surface Transportation, Maritime, Freight, and Ports**

**Subcommittee Hearing: Examining the Roadway Safety Crisis and Highlighting
Community Solutions**

May 21, 2024

Opening Statement

Every day, unfortunately, more than 100 Americans lose their lives on our roads.

If trends continue, we expect more than 40,000 fatalities this year, and hundreds of thousands of serious injuries. That means thousands of families are going to be torn apart by preventable crashes.

Those families deserve our recognition as we work to address this problem. And that's why I'd like to enter into the record statements made by victim's families who have written to this committee to urge for further action on roadway safety. Without objection, those letters will be entered into the record.

I also dedicate today's discussion to them as these families know all too well, the safety situation on our roads constitutes a national crisis.

In 2021, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimated that the U.S. had the highest number of fatalities since 2005. Unfortunately, the trend has not significantly improved over the past two years. According to NHTSA's most recent estimates, roadway deaths remain elevated with only a 3 percent reduction in 2023.

These numbers do not reflect the harm done to our drivers and passengers, but also vulnerable pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorcyclists who continue to be disproportionately harmed on our roads.

Also overrepresented in these tragedies are Black, Hispanic, and Native Americans, as well as Americans living in rural areas.

We need a strong and comprehensive response, and today we'll discuss a holistic, safe systems approach to addressing the roadway safety crisis and how we can implement that approach all across our country.

The safe systems approach ensures that all aspects of our roadways account for inevitable human error. It emphasizes building multiple layers of protection so that even when mistakes are made, death and injury are unlikely.

This framework focuses on five key categories: safer people and behaviors, safer vehicles, safer speeds, safer roads, and improving the post-crash care.

I believe emerging technologies are going to play an important role in this endeavor.

New interventions, from digital infrastructure that improves crash response to predictive road maintenance and active traffic management, are absolutely essential to achieving safe system goals.

That also includes the safe and accountable development, testing, and deployment of autonomous vehicles, which can help us reduce serious injuries and death on our roadways.

I expect our witnesses today to discuss the principles and data behind the safe systems approach, as well as how we can better support communities implementing these solutions on the ground.

We have already made important progress. Congress took one key step towards supporting roadway safety with the passage of the bipartisan infrastructure law in 2021.

The law provides \$5 billion in Safe Streets for All grants for local, regional, and tribal communities to prevent roadway deaths and injuries using a safe systems approach and requires them to measure their success along the way.

The bipartisan infrastructure law is also the first piece of legislation to establish requirements for complete street standards. These ensure that our roadways can safely accommodate all traffic, that includes vulnerable road users like pedestrians, bicyclists, motorcyclists, and people with disabilities as well as the elderly.

And finally, with the help of Michigander Rana Abbas Taylor, the bipartisan infrastructure law included the *Honoring the Abbas Family Legacy to Terminate Drunk Driving Act*, a requirement for the inclusion of impaired driving prevention technology in our vehicles.

Today, we will learn more about the challenges and the opportunities these provisions are opposing for communities on the ground.

But the bipartisan infrastructure law was just the beginning. There's still so much more that we can and we must do in order to address this crisis.

Our witnesses will also help us examine what solutions need to come next. I would like to thank each of you for being here today and for the expertise that you're going to share with this committee, and for all you do each and every day to make our streets and our highways safer.