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DRIVING INNOVATION®

**Joint Committee Hearing – Senate and House Committees on Transportation
Tuesday, July 14, 2015
North Office Building, Hearing Room 1, 9:30am-12:00pm
*“Enhancing the Safety of Highway Workers, Drivers and Pedestrians”***

Testimony by Wayne Weikel, on behalf of the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers

My name is Wayne Weikel and I am Director of State Government Affairs for the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers (Alliance). The Alliance is a trade association representing twelve of the world’s leading car and light truck manufacturers, including of BMW Group, FCA US LLC, Ford Motor Company, General Motors Company, Jaguar Land Rover, Mazda, Mercedes-Benz USA, Mitsubishi Motors, Porsche, Toyota, Volkswagen Group of America, and Volvo Cars.

We appreciate the opportunity to speak to the committee today about efforts made by automobile manufacturers to combat distracted driving.

The Alliance has long understood that distracted driving is both a public policy and a public health issue. In our increasingly connected society, we recognize the reality of the situation – that our consumers are going to want to use their connected devices while in our cars. Understanding this, the Alliance has pushed for sensible public policy positions, such as bans on texting while driving and requirements for hands-free mobile phone use. For the last 5 years we have also teamed with the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons to publicize an anti-distracted driving campaign called “Decide to Drive” (www.decidetodrive.org). The campaign – which targets young adults through age-appropriate engagement such as Instagram, Facebook, hashtags – focuses on the motto of *eyes on the road; hands on the wheel*. The campaign won a CLIO in 2012 for advancement in the area of public health.

Instead of simply telling consumers how to behave, however, our members recognized that there was more that could be done. Studies have shown that the biggest cognitive distraction for a driver comes from visual and manual tasks. This is what makes texting while driving so dangerous – a driver’s eyes come off the road, their hands come off the wheel, and their brain comes off the primary task at hand, which is safely getting the vehicle down the road. To combat the worst-case risk of visual and manual distractions, automakers have invested millions to help integrate tasks, previously conducted on a smartphone, into main vehicle infotainment systems.

First, was the integration of phone tasks. By using Bluetooth to pair a driver’s phone with the car, when the phone rings, the driver doesn’t have to go looking for the phone – requiring both eyes and hands – nor do they have to hold the phone for the duration of the call. By using speech-to-text technology, a driver can dictate the content of a text instead of using their hands to do so.

Second, was the integration of phone operating systems into the vehicle entertainment systems, making in-vehicle screens look and act more like the driver’s smartphone. When people are so comfortable and familiar with the layout and operation of their phone’s operating system, why confront them with a completely different system in the car? When a driver’s phone is paired with the vehicle, if they want to

listen to music in the car, they can access it in the same manner as on their phone, but through the vehicle main touchscreen. The easier the task is, the less focus drawn away from operating the vehicle. This applies to navigation applications too. Presenting navigation information in a similar manner to how it is found on a driver's phone eases the task, but it also gives auto manufacturers some control over how the phone is used and limiting what features can be accessed. Auto manufacturers have worked with tech companies like Apple and Google to develop these integrated systems to help drivers keep their eyes on the road and hands on the wheel.

This is where we are today, but when we look to the future the capabilities of technology become pretty exciting. I'd like to highlight a few for the committee:

- Vehicle infotainment system that is based on hand gestures for certain common tasks. This should reduce the length of time looking away from the road for a specific button or having a hand off the wheel to activate a traditional button.
- Driver alertness monitor that tracks eye movements to measure how engaged the driver is in the driving task or whether they display signs of getting tired behind the wheel. It will also be able to monitor when a driver has their eyes somewhere other than on the road in front of them, and use haptic sensors to get the driver's attention.
- Information prioritization systems that analyze not just the driver's behavior, but also the area around the vehicle, for the purpose of managing the information provided to the driver. For example, such a system would delay displaying a non-critical warning light for 15-30 seconds, if the system noticed that the driver was merging onto a highway.

Auto manufacturers have not simply been working on how to combat distracted driving. The overarching question is really how can we help drivers drive safer? Given that an estimated 90% of all accidents involve human error, the answer often times is automation.

Automakers are bringing to market vehicles that are increasingly automated. With each new model year, we will see new technologies to avoid accidents, regardless of what the operator may be doing. Forward crash avoidance systems will monitor the roadway in front of a vehicle and will brake automatically – even in the absence of driver input – to avoid rear-ending the car in front of it. Advanced cruise control will be able to go down a highway without input from the driver, but will be programmed to keep ample distance between it and the car ahead to avoid accidents.

Ultimately, the question of distracted driving is one of passenger safety. Automakers have invested millions to develop new technologies to help keep our drivers safe. We have recognized that an increasingly connected consumer will seek to utilize their connected device while operating a vehicle, and have taken steps to help that consumer do so in a safer manner.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. If I can answer any questions or provide any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at 202-326-5550 or wweikel@autoalliance.org.