



Testimony of

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Before the

Transportation and the Environment Committee
Council of the District of Columbia

– On –

B25-0425
Strengthening Traffic Enforcement, Education, and Responsibility
("STEER") Amendment Act of 2023

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Good morning, Chair Allen, and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity for the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) to testify before you today.

The NTSB is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating aviation, marine, and rail accidents, commercial space launch and re-entry mishaps, highway crashes, and hazardous materials releases, in pipelines and elsewhere in transportation.

We determine their probable causes and issue safety recommendations to prevent them from happening again. We also conduct safety research. The NTSB has no power to regulate or legislate, and we rely on the persuasive power of our comprehensive investigations and research to encourage the recipients of our recommendations to act to improve safety.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of the implementation of intelligent speed assistance (ISA) systems to reduce the deadly impact that speeding causes on our roads. The NTSB has long supported ISA as a vehicle-based technology to help drivers maintain safe speeds. Since 2012, we have recommended such technology that, at a minimum, warns drivers when their vehicle exceeds the speed limit.¹ By prioritizing the implementation of the establishment of the Intelligent Speed Assistance program as required in B25-0425, the District of Columbia would show that it prioritizes safety by requiring ISA devices for repeat speed offenders.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has estimated that nearly 41,000 people were killed on our roads in 2023, including at least 45 people in DC.² NHTSA's estimate also shows that speeding contributed to 46 percent of all traffic fatalities in the District in 2021.³

Speed-related fatalities are preventable and unacceptable, and the NTSB has long focused on speeding as a major highway safety issue. Speeding increases the chances of being in a crash as well as the severity of the crash when one does occur. Unfortunately, speeding-related crashes are not a new issue nationwide; we investigated over 50 major crashes between 1967 and 2021 where we identified speed as a safety issue or causal or contributing factor. Some of these drivers were going double or even triple the speed limit.

¹ <https://www.nts.gov/investigations/AccidentReports/Reports/HAR1201.pdf>

² <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813561>

³ <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813509.pdf>

In 2017, we published a safety study, *Reducing Speeding-Related Crashes Involving Passenger Vehicles*,⁴ which examined causes of and trends in speeding-related passenger vehicle crashes and countermeasures to prevent these crashes. As a result of this study, we recommended that NHTSA incentivize passenger vehicle manufacturers and consumers to adopt ISA systems by, for example, including ISA in the New Car Assessment Program. Since that time, NHTSA has taken little action toward encouraging passenger vehicle manufacturers or consumers to adopt ISA, or to include ISA in the US NCAP, as recommended.

One of our most recent highway investigations that found excessive speed as a causal factor was a multivehicle collision in January of 2022, in North Las Vegas, Nevada, that resulted in nine fatalities.⁵ The crash occurred when a vehicle ran a red light while traveling at 103 mph, nearly three times the legal speed limit of 35 mph. The vehicle impacted multiple other vehicles, including a minivan with seven occupants, all of whom died in the crash. The driver in this crash was impaired and had a history of high-risk driving behavior, including multiple recent speeding offenses.

ISA is a system that compares a vehicle's GPS location to a database of posted speed limits and uses the vehicle's onboard cameras to recognize speed limit signs to ensure safe and legal speeds. Passive ISA systems warn a driver when the vehicle exceeds the speed limit through visual, sound, or haptic alerts, and the driver is responsible for slowing the vehicle. Active systems include mechanisms that make it more difficult, but not impossible, to increase the speed of a vehicle above the posted speed limit and ones that electronically limit the speed of the vehicle to fully prevent drivers from exceeding the speed limit or a set speed above the limit. These systems are beneficial for all drivers but may have even more benefit for risky drivers. In the case of the North Las Vegas crash, we found that, given the driver's impairment and history of speeding offenses, an active ISA system that electronically limits the speed of the vehicle may have mitigated the severity of the crash.

Our investigation report for the North Las Vegas crash listed multiple findings related to ISA systems and deterrence of repeat speeding offenders, including the following:

- Broad deployment of ISA systems would reduce the frequency of speeding and speeding-related crashes like the one in North Las Vegas, saving lives and preventing injuries.
- Because the driver in the North Las Vegas crash was a repeat speeding offender, he was more likely to cause a speeding-related fatal crash.

⁴ <https://www.nts.gov/safety/safety-studies/Documents/SS1701.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.nts.gov/investigations/AccidentReports/Reports/HIR2309.pdf>

- Repeat speeding is a nationwide problem, but evidence-based countermeasures targeting repeat speeding offenders and high-risk drivers are lacking.
- ISA systems have the potential to reduce speeding among repeat speeding offenders.

In response to these findings, we recommended that NHTSA conduct research and develop guidelines to help states implement pilot ISA interlock programs limiting the vehicle speed for repeat speeding offenders. We also recommended that states, and the District of Columbia, implement programs to identify repeat speeding offenders and measurably reduce speeding recidivism. Requiring an ISA system for repeat speed offenders is one option, if implemented by DC, could help satisfy this recommendation, even without guidance from NHTSA.

Although NHTSA has been slow to act on our recommendations related to this life-saving technology, it has recently added ISA to its list of countermeasures that work.⁶ ISA is not a new technology, and it has been implemented widely both in the United States and around the world. It is already an option offered by many US manufacturers for commercial and passenger vehicles.⁷ Additionally, ISA has been used in European countries for years and will soon be mandatory in all new vehicles sold in the European Union.⁸ New York City is currently running a pilot program with city-owned vehicles using an aftermarket active ISA system, and other cities and local governments around the United States are beginning to embrace ISA in their fleets.

We believe that the only acceptable number of deaths on our roads is zero, and it has been our charge since our founding to issue recommendations to eliminate or mitigate transportation fatalities. Education and enforcement are important tools to prevent speeding. The Safe System approach requires that vehicle technologies need to be part of the solution, as well. ISA is a proven countermeasure that, if widely deployed, especially among the most dangerous drivers, will save lives on DC's roads, and we applaud you for pursuing this policy.

⁶ <https://www.nhtsa.gov/book/countermeasures-that-work/speeding-and-speed-management/countermeasures/other-strategies-behavior-change/intelligent>

⁷ See initial responses to Recommendation H-23-20: data.nts.gov/carol-main-public/sr-details/H-23-020

⁸ See EUR-Lex - 02019R2144-20220905 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu).