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January 26, 2007

Margaret O'Brien  
Chief Information officer  
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration  
400 7<sup>th</sup> Street, SW  
Washington, DC

RE: Preservation of NHTSA Records

Dear Ms. O'Brien:

We are writing to express our concern about the availability of documents and the preservation of agency records through the Technical Information Services (TIS). We are particularly concerned about the loss of access to historical materials and decisions about the TIS that have not fully considered the effects on public accessibility to retrieve information.

The organizations and individuals listed below are involved in motor vehicle research, investigation, advocacy, and education. Our goal is to ensure that important materials documenting NHTSA historic activities are not destroyed and that they are maintained in a fashion that allows continued public access—without the addition of further barriers.

What may appear to be minor changes or elimination of duplicative materials can create significant impediments in the public's ability to research NHTSA's rulemaking or investigative activities, as well as to other agency staff who respond to information requests.

Shipping records to the Suitland Records Center or the National Archives will create an enormously cumbersome system for public use. As you know, the National Archives houses documents from all branches, agencies, and organizations within our government. Documents are housed in boxes with general and imprecise indexing that require an extraordinary amount of time to locate, which further reduces public accessibility, especially in a timely manner. The files at the Suitland Records Center are not readily accessible to the public. An agent of NHTSA has to grant permission for

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records center staff to retrieve records for public viewing for each visit, which will increase workloads on key personnel. The elimination of TIS and its records, or outsourcing these records to other government centers, creates a significant barrier to public access.

Many of us have witnessed reduced availability or complete loss of historical documents. Large numbers of these documents previously available have gone missing as TIS changed systems. These materials continue to be relevant because current safety issues can only be understood and analyzed in the context of the complete historical record. Examining the evolution of concepts, actions, and proposals is an important part of the public's ability to understand motor vehicle safety issues and policies—and to participate in their evolution. Regulations are not frequently revamped and issues that have been investigated in the past are often re-investigated by the agency in other contexts. These activities can span decades.

As stakeholders, we request the agency plans related to document retention and changes to the TIS. We further request your office provide us an opportunity to meet with you to discuss these issues further.

- BioInjury, LLC
- Center for Auto Safety
- Center for Injury Research
- Consumer Federation of America / Jack Gillis
- KIDS and CARS
- Public Citizen
- SafetyBeltSafe, U.S.A.
- Safety Research & Strategies
- Safe Ride News Publications
- Lindsey Research
- Longacre & Associates
- LS Sherman Consulting
- Motor Vehicle Hazards Archives Project
- Mouzon Information Services
- Quality Control Systems Corp.

Sincerely,

Sean E. Kane

CC Nicole Nason, Administrator  
Anthony Cooke, Chief Counsel  
Gregory Walter, Sr. Associate Administrator, Policy & Operations  
Calvin L. Scovel, DOT Inspector General  
John Donaldson, Asst. Chief Counsel for Legislation and General Law  
Kevin Mahoney, Corporate Customer Services  
Kevin Ball, TIS Director