



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**National Highway
Traffic Safety
Administration**

400 Seventh St., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

JUL 13 2005

Ms. Karen Bolin
President
Motorcycle Riders Foundation
P.O. Box 1808
Washington, D.C. 20013-1808

Re: Your letter to Dr. Jeffrey Runge, Administrator, NHTSA relating to questions from preliminary FARS data released in April 2005

Dear Ms. Bolin:

Thank you for your letter regarding the request for information based on the 2004 projections specifically relating to the three questions on motorcycle exposure (vehicle miles of travel (VMT) and registration) data. We appreciate your interest in highway safety and your concern about the recent large annual increases in motorcyclist fatalities. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is also concerned about the continuing increase in motorcyclist fatalities.

Through our data systems, such as the Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS), NHTSA collects data on motor vehicle crashes, including those involving motorcycles. NHTSA, however, does not collect data on VMT or on the number of registered vehicles. The VMT and registration data used by NHTSA are collected and published annually by our sister agency, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Because the three specific questions in your letter were related to the methods used to collect and validate motorcycle VMT and registration data, NHTSA consulted with the FHWA staff involved in these procedures to obtain responses to your questions. The information we received from FHWA is incorporated in the responses below.

In the following comments, note that data for calendar year 2004 is still in the process of being reported by the states:

1. **Question:** The MRF would like to know the specific method and/or formula NHTSA uses to gather and calculate the motorcycle VMT numbers and number of motorcycle registrations reported in FARS data each year from 1997 through 2004.

Response: At the national level, the motorcycle VMT estimate is taken from Table VM-1 "Annual Vehicle Distance Traveled in Miles and Related Data" published annually as part of



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FHWA's "Highway Statistics" report series which can be viewed at <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policy/ohpi/hss/hsspubs.htm>

The estimate of motorcycle VMT is based on data reported by the states to FHWA's Highway Performance Monitoring System (HPMS). The HPMS provides estimates of VMT for each State as well as an estimate of the proportion the VMT that is due to motorcycle travel. The HPMS reporting instructions are part of the HPMS Field Manual. The Field Manual can be viewed at <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ohim/hpmsmanl/hpms.htm>

Motorcycle registration data is reported to FHWA by the states. The reporting instructions are in Chapter three of FHWA's "Guide to Reporting Highway Statistics" which can be found at <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policy/ohpi/hss/guide.htm>

2. **Question:** The MRF requests that you verify whether or not NHTSA is confident that the motorcycle VMT numbers and the number of motorcycle registrations reported in FARS are accurate for each year from 1997 through 2004.

Response: NHTSA believes that the VMT data collected by FHWA are the best data available. Appendix F of the HPMS field manual discusses the procedures to be used in collecting the various traffic data items. For the 1997 to 2003 period similar methods were in place to report the HPMS data. Similar methods are also in use for the reporting of 2004 data. Because of this, we believe these numbers are adequate for monitoring trends.

Since motorcycle registration data are provided directly to FHWA by each State, quality is a function of each State's ability to correctly report its administrative records.

All data reported to FHWA's Office of Highway Policy Information are reviewed prior to their release for public use. The review processes include: conformance to the reporting requirements for the various data systems, assessment of the validity of the sample designs used by the states for reporting the data, periodic process reviews of specific data systems, reasonableness of reported data to related data series as well as the pattern of multi-year trends.

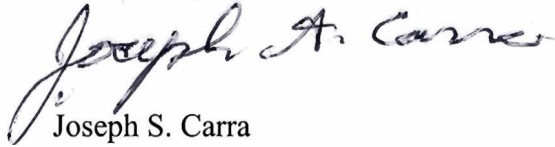
3. **Question:** The MRF requests a State-by-State breakdown, by year, of the number of motorcycle registrations and motorcycle VMT numbers reported in FARS from 1997 through 2004.

Response: The State-by-State VMT values for the years 1997 to 2003 can be found in Table VM-2 "Functional System Travel" published annually as part of FHWA's "Highway Statistics" report series. The estimate of the proportion of State-by-State VMT that is due to motorcycles as reported to the HPMS is enclosed.

State-by-State estimates of motorcycle registrations for the years 1997 to 2003 can be found in Table MV-1 "State Motor-Vehicle Registrations" published annually as part of FHWA's "Highway Statistics" report series mentioned above.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at (202) 366-1503, if you any questions relating to motor vehicle crash data. Barna Juhasz, Director, Office of Highway Policy Information, FHWA may be contacted at (202) 366-0180, if you have any further questions on VMT and registration data.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph S. Carra". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J".

Joseph S. Carra
Associate Administrator
National Center for Statistics and Analysis

Enclosures

cc: Barna Juhasz (FHWA)
Ed Kashuba (FHWA)
Diane Wigle (NHTSA)