

Testimony of:

JAMES R. BROWN

President-General Manager

Erie County Motor Club

Once-A-Year Motor Vehicle Inspection  
before the Senate Transportation Committee

Erie Council Chambers  
Erie, Pennsylvania

August 20, 1981

Mr. Chairman and members of the Senate Transportation Committee:  
Good afternoon. I am James R. Brown, President and General Manager of the Erie County Motor Club with offices in Erie, Corry, Girard and North East. We represent 31,700 AAA members in Erie County.

I am glad to be here today on behalf of the Erie County Motor Club to present our view on once-a-year motor vehicle safety inspection, especially as proposed in HB-562.

The Erie County Motor Club has taken a close look at the Commonwealth semiannual motor vehicle safety inspection and was the first major organization along with our State PAAAF in 1979 to call for reducing this inspection program to just once a year.

The efficacy of the periodic motor vehicle inspection system has been the object of many highway safety studies, as reported in the April 8, 1980 Wall Street Journal editorial "Death by Regulation." "Objective highway safety studies have indicated for years that auto safety inspections operated states have little bearing on highway safety," the editorial points out. Human factors are by far the dominant cause of accidents.

This fact is supported by a recent study conducted by the Indiana University Institute for Research in Public Safety which found that human factors were definite causes in 85% of the accidents, and vehicle factors were definite causes in only 6% of the accidents. In January, 1981, the Office of Budget and Administration of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania released its own study of the motor vehicle inspection system. The OBA found that 80% of the causal factors in all motor vehicle accidents in 1978 in Pennsylvania could be classified as human factors, 17% as environmental factors, and only 3% as vehicle factors.

The OBA study went on to say: "Semiannual motor vehicle inspection is not a cost-effective means of controlling motor vehicle accident rates. In fact, this study confirms the findings of several others which have concluded that accident rates among states with annual and semiannual inspections are essentially the same as those in states with no vehicle inspection programs after basic socioeconomic, demographic, environmental and highway differences are taken into account." The 1980 report by Mark Crain, conducted for the American Enterprise Institute, is one of these.

At this point Pennsylvania is one of only six states that have twice-a-year safety inspections, 22 states have annual inspection, five states have random, and 18 states have none.

It is the conclusion of the OBA study--and the Erie County Motor Club concurs--that if vehicle inspection standards, procedures and requirements were related as closely as possible to the mechanical components and conditions most often implicated in vehicle defect accidents, the effectiveness of the PMVI program would likely be enhanced. When the OBA examined the 3% of the vehicle accidents related to vehicle causal factors, they found that brake failures accounted for 0.9% of all listed accident causal factors, followed by tires 9.7%, steering 0.3% and lights less than 0.1%. (Miscellaneous other vehicle failures accounted for 0.9%) Over the ten-year period from 1969 to 1978, the State found, apparently only a relatively small proportion of Pennsylvania motor vehicle accidents, approximately 3%, are caused by vehicle factors.

Thus the study concludes--and we agree-- that an annual inspection cycle would be no less effective than the semiannual inspection cycle currently used in Pennsylvania because of the small percentage of traffic accidents related to vehicle defects. It is our belief that an annual inspection for cars and light trucks geared to the key vehicle components would not have any detrimental effect on vehicles and, therefore, on highway safety. The key vehicle components would be the brake, system, tires, steering and lights.

Among the principal benefits gained by reducing the inspection frequency for cars and light trucks would be a cost-saving to the motoring public. It is estimated by the OBA that Pennsylvania motorists would save approximately \$61 million a year in inspection fees alone, i.e., the charges by inspection garages just for looking over one's car, and an additional \$16 million in time and travel costs. That is a very significant amount of money.

Another benefit from going to annual instead of semiannual inspection would be to save the State over a million dollars a year in administrative costs, according to the OBA study.

It is argued by proponents of the semiannual inspection system that repair bills will escalate as a result of an annual inspection program. According to the OBA, the vehicle repair costs are not expected to be any greater than

an annual inspection cycle because under the present system most defective components already require complete replacement when discovered. By this we mean things like tires, brake linings, brake drums when scored, and headlights.

The opponents of once-a-year inspection will tell you that anything less than twice-a-year is unsafe, that cars can't last a year without inspection, that Pennsylvania motorists are going to wind up the losers if we depart from our semiannual system. It needs to be said in response to this, however, that this argument is being made chiefly by those who stand to gain financially from the current system, i.e., the inspection station industry. The statistics that we have seen, many of which are in the OBA report and some of which are included as an appendix to these remarks as developed by us, do not show states to have any better safety record for having two inspections as opposed to one inspection or even random inspection. So the system in Pennsylvania may be a good one for maintenance but does not prove itself as necessary for safety. And safety is what the program is all about.

Indeed, we should not confuse an annual safety inspection program with preventive maintenance. The purpose of a safety inspection program is to inspect those items which are related to the safety of the vehicle; maintenance, on the other hand, is a personal and variable thing, depending on the individual's preference and the amount and type of driving he does. We should not continue the system of letting a program, intended solely to identify and correct worn-out or defective equipment that could lead to highway accidents, be also a catch-all program for general maintenance. The latter is something that the motorist should take care of on his own--this we know only too well from our own emergency road service that each club offers. The motorist of course has the option, but not the obligation, to combine maintenance work with the required safety inspection.

In conclusion, we support HB-562 as a proposal whose time has come and urge you to act favorably on the bill.

VEHICLE SAFETY INSPECTION - FREQUENCY\* AND HIGHWAY FATALITY RATE\*\*

ANNUAL

<u>STATE</u>	1980 DEATHS/ 100,000,000 VMT
Arkansas	3.5
Colorado	3.4
Connecticut (Vol. only)	2.9
Delaware	3.1
District of Columbia	1.6
Florida	3.5
Georgia	3.3
Hawaii	4.0
Indiana	3.0
Louisiana	4.8
Mississippi	4.3

<u>STATE</u>	1980 DEATHS/ 100,000,000 VMT
Missouri	3.4
Nebraska	2.7
New Jersey	2.1
New York	3.8
North Carolina	3.6
Oklahoma	3.3
Rhode Island	1.9
South Carolina	3.8
Texas	4.1
Utah	3.5
West Virginia	4.8

SEMIANNUAL

<u>STATE</u>	1980 DEATHS/ 100,000,000 VMT
Maine	3.3
Massachusetts	2.8
New Hampshire	3.0
Pennsylvania	3.0
Vermont	4.4
Virginia	2.6

RANDOM

California	3.4
Michigan	2.9
North Dakota	2.5
Ohio	3.1
Wisconsin	3.0

NONE

Alabama	3.7
Alaska	3.1
Arizona	5.1
Idaho	4.4
Illinois	3.1
Iowa	3.1
Kansas	3.4
Kentucky	3.2
Maryland	2.4
Minnesota	3.0
Montana	4.9
Nevada	6.3
New Mexico	5.6
Oregon	3.5
South Dakota	3.8
Tennessee	3.2
Washington	3.5
Wyoming	5.3

\* Digest of Motor Laws, 1980 - American Automobile Association

\*\* National Safety Council: Accident Facts 1980