

In a motor vehicle oriented society like ours—where some 100 million autos, trucks, and buses are operated nearly a trillion miles a year by 100 million licensed drivers—it is absolutely essential that we have an efficient, equitable system for providing compensation to those who are injured and to the dependents of those who are killed in accidents.

Since the automobile first came into use as a major form of transportation, we have relied on tort litigation and insurance to provide this compensation.

But increasingly, for a host of reasons, the adequacy of the traditional techniques for providing compensation has come under intense challenge.

As President Johnson said in his consumer interest message to the Congress on February 6:

Every motorist, every passenger, and every pedestrian is affected by auto insurance—yet the system is overburdened and unsatisfactory.

Auto insurance clearly has become a major national problem—one that will only become more so as we license more drivers, produce more automobiles, and build more roads.

In recent years the Congress has enacted legislation designed to reduce the number of traffic accidents and to curtail the severity of injuries.

Passage of the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act and the National Highway Safety Act—both signed into law in 1966 by President Johnson—authorized the issuance of vehicle safety standards and provided financial aid for the States in support of highway safety programs.

The Department of Transportation is now at work implementing those measures. Much remains to be done, but substantial steps are being taken by my Department, by the States, and by industry to reduce the toll of human life and injury inflicted by vehicle accidents.

What ever we do to check and reduce the number of auto accidents and to minimize their human consequences, however, they can never completely be eliminated.

We must recognize this as a fact and take every step necessary to provide the victims with compensation for their losses.

The scale and importance of the problem is made clear by recalling a few statistics. In 1966, some 53,000 people were killed in traffic accidents. According to the National Safety Council, 1.9 million suffered disabling injuries and, of these, 160,000 were left with some permanent impairment.

This means that each day on the average there were 145 deaths and over 5,000 disabling injuries directly attributable to motor vehicle accidents.

The economic loss of the injured is immense. Medical expense amounted to \$600 million. Actual and anticipated wage losses were estimated at \$2.6 billion. Property losses aggregated an additional \$3.3 billion.

Staggering though it is, the more than \$6 billion in economic losses sustained by individuals does not represent the total cost of auto accidents to society.