

commercial space transportation legislation, and an activities report from FAA's Associate Administrator for Commercial Space Transportation. An agenda will be posted on the FAA Web site at <http://ast.faa.gov>. Meetings of the COMSTAC Working Groups (Technology and Innovation, Reusable Launch Vehicle, Risk Management, and Launch Operations and Support) will be held on Tuesday, October 26, 2004. For specific information concerning the times and locations of the working group meetings, contact the Contact group listed below.

Individuals who plan to attend and need special assistance, such as sign language interpretation or other reasonable accommodations, should inform the Contact Person listed below in advance of the meeting.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Brenda Parker (AST-200), Office of the Associate Administrator for Commercial Space Transportation (AST), 800 Independence Avenue, SW., Room 331, Washington, DC 20591, telephone (202) 385-4713; e-mail brenda.parker@faa.dot.gov.

Issued in Washington, DC, September 28, 2004.

Patricia G. Smith,

Associate Administrator for Commercial Space Transportation.

[FR Doc. 04-22277 Filed 10-1-04; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Federal Highway Administration

Environmental Impact Statement: Etowah County, AL

AGENCY: Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Department of Transportation.

ACTION: Notice of intent.

SUMMARY: The FHWA is issuing this notice to advise the public that an Environmental Impact Statement will be prepared for a proposed highway project in Etowah County, Alabama. This Notice of Intent (NOI) supersedes a NOI for this proposed project that was issued by the FHWA in the **Federal Register** dated May 29, 2001 (Volume 66, Number 103) Public involvement and coordination activities on the original proposal have resulted in a change in the scope of the project that should better meet the needs of local community and impacted neighborhoods.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Joe D. Wilkerson, Division Administrator, Federal Highway

Administration, 500 Eastern Boulevard, Suite 200, Montgomery, Alabama 36117, Telephone: (334) 223-7370.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The FHWA, in cooperation with the State of Alabama Department of Transportation, will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Alabama Project HPP-1602 (539), old project number NHF-PE 94 (2). The proposal is to construct a limited access facility from the eastern terminus of Interstate Highway 759 (I-759) near George Wallace Drive to an interchange with U.S. Highway 431 and U.S. Highway 278 in the city of Gadsden, Alabama. The project will be a multi-lane roadway on new location. The proposal will allow traffic from I-759 to flow through the city of Gadsden.

Alternatives under consideration include (1) alternate route locations, (2) a no-action alternative, and (3) postponing the action.

Letters describing the proposed action and soliciting comments will be sent to appropriate Federal, State, and local agencies and to private organizations and citizens that have previously expressed or are known to have an interest in this proposal. A public involvement meeting and a public hearing will be held in the city of Gadsden. Public notice with be given of the time and place for the meeting and hearing. A formal scoping meeting will not be held.

To ensure that the full range of issues related to this proposed action are addressed and all significant issues identified, comments and suggestions are invited from all interested parties. Comments or questions concerning this proposed action and the EIS should be directed to the FHWA at the address provided above.

(Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Program Number 20.205, Highway Planning and Construction. The regulations implementing Executive Order 12372 regarding intergovernmental consultation on Federal programs and activities apply to this program.)

Issued on: September 21, 2004.

Joe D. Wilkerson,

Division Administrator, Montgomery, Alabama.

[FR Doc. 04-22181 Filed 10-1-04; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Petition for Exemption from the Vehicle Theft Prevention Standard; Nissan North America, Inc.

AGENCY: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), Department of Transportation (DOT).

ACTION: Grant of petition for exemption.

SUMMARY: This notice grants in full the petition of Nissan North America, Inc., (Nissan) for an exemption of a high-theft vehicle line, [whose nameplate is confidential], from the parts-marking requirements of the Federal motor vehicle theft prevention standard. This petition is granted because the agency has determined that the antitheft device to be placed on the line as standard equipment is likely to be as effective in reducing and deterring motor vehicle theft as compliance with the parts-marking requirements of the Theft Prevention Standard. Nissan requested confidential treatment for the information and attachments it submitted in support of its petition. In a letter dated July 23, 2004, the agency granted the petitioner's request for confidential treatment of most aspects of its petition.

DATES: The exemption granted by this notice is effective beginning with the [confidential] model year.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ms. Rosalind Proctor, Office of International Policy, Fuel Economy and Consumer Programs, NHTSA, 400 Seventh Street, SW., Washington, DC 20590. Ms. Proctor's telephone number is (202) 366-0846. Her fax number is (202) 493-2290.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: In a petition dated June 23, 2004, Nissan North America, Inc. (Nissan), requested exemption from the parts-marking requirements of the theft prevention standard (49 CFR Part 541) for a vehicle line. The nameplate of the line and the model year of introduction are confidential. The petition has been filed pursuant to 49 CFR Part 543, *Exemption from Vehicle Theft Prevention Standard*, based on the installation of an antitheft device as standard equipment for an entire vehicle line. Based on the evidence submitted by Nissan, the agency believes that the antitheft device for the vehicle line is likely to be as effective in reducing and deterring motor vehicle theft as compliance with the parts-marking requirements of the theft prevention standard (49 CFR Part 541).

Section 33106(b)(2)(D) of Title 49, United States Code, gave the Secretary of Transportation the authority to grant a manufacturer *one* parts-marking exemption per model year for vehicle lines produced MYs' 1997–2000. However, it does not address the contingency of what to do after model year 2000 in the absence of a decision under Section 33103(d). 49 U.S.C. 33103(d)(3), states that the number of lines for which the agency can grant an exemption is to be decided after the Attorney General completes a review of the effectiveness of antitheft devices and finds that antitheft devices are an effective substitute for parts-marking. The Attorney General has not yet made a finding pursuant to 49 U.S.C. 33103(d)(3), *Long Range Review of Effectiveness*, and has not decided the number of lines, if any, for which the agency will be authorized to grant an exemption. Upon consultation with the Department of Justice, both agencies determined that the appropriate reading of Section 33103(d) is that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) may continue to grant parts-marking exemptions for no more than one additional model line each year, as specified for model years 1997–2000 by 49 U.S.C. 33106(b)(2)(C). This is the level contemplated by the Act for the period before the Attorney General's decision. The final decision on whether to continue granting exemptions will be made by the Attorney General at the conclusion of the review pursuant to Section 33103(d)(3).

Nissan's submittal is considered a complete petition, as required by 49 CFR 543.7, in that it meets the general requirements contained in "543.5 and the specific content requirements of "543.6. In its petition, Nissan provided a detailed description and diagram of the identity, design, and location of the components of the antitheft device for the new line. Nissan requested confidential treatment for the information it submitted in support of its petition. In a letter dated July 23, 2004, the agency granted the petitioner's request for confidential treatment of most aspects of its petition.

In order to ensure reliability and durability of the device, Nissan conducted tests based on its own specified standards. Nissan provided a detailed list of the tests conducted and believes that the device is reliable and durable since the device complied with its specified requirements for each test.

Nissan compared the device proposed for its vehicle line with devices which NHTSA has determined to be as effective in reducing and deterring motor vehicle theft as would

compliance with the parts-marking requirements. Nissan stated that its proposed device, as well as other comparable devices that have received full exemptions from the parts-marking requirements, lack an audible and visible alarm. Therefore, these devices cannot perform one of the functions listed in 49 CFR 542.6(a)(3), that is, to call attention to unauthorized attempts to enter or move the vehicle. However, theft data have indicated a decline in theft rates for vehicle lines that have been equipped with antitheft devices similar to that which Nissan purposes. In these instances, the agency has concluded that the lack of a visual or audible alarm has not prevented these antitheft devices from being effective protection against theft.

On the basis of this comparison, Nissan has concluded that the antitheft device proposed for its vehicle line is no less effective than those devices in the lines for which NHTSA has already granted full exemption from the parts-marking requirements.

Based on the evidence submitted by Nissan, the agency believes that the antitheft device for the Nissan vehicle line is likely to be as effective in reducing and deterring motor vehicle theft as compliance with the parts-marking requirements of the Theft Prevention Standard.

The agency concludes that the device will provide four of the five types of performance listed in § 543.6(a)(3): Promoting activation; preventing defeat or circumvention of the device by unauthorized persons; preventing operation of the vehicle by unauthorized entrants; and ensuring the reliability and durability of the device.

As required by 49 U.S.C. 33106 and 49 CFR 543.6 (a)(4) and (5), the agency finds that Nissan has provided adequate reasons for its belief that the antitheft device will reduce and deter theft. This conclusion is based on the information Nissan provided about its device, much of which is confidential. This confidential information included a description of reliability and functional tests conducted by Nissan for the antitheft device and its components.

For the foregoing reasons, the agency hereby grants in full Nissan's petition for exemption for the vehicle line from the parts-marking requirements of 49 CFR Part 541. The agency notes that 49 CFR Part 541, Appendix A–1, identifies those lines that are exempted from the Theft Prevention Standard for a given model year. Advanced listing, including the release of future product nameplates, is necessary in order to notify law enforcement agencies of new vehicle lines exempted from the parts

marking requirements of the Theft Prevention Standard. Since Nissan has been granted confidential treatment for its vehicle line, the confidential status of its nameplate will be protected until the introduction of its vehicle line into the market place. At that time, Appendix A–1 will be revised to reflect the nameplate of Nissan's exempted vehicle line.

If Nissan decides not to use the exemption for this line, it must formally notify the agency, and, thereafter, the line must be fully marked as required by 49 CFR 541.5 and 541.6 (marking of major component parts and replacement parts).

NHTSA notes that if Nissan wishes in the future to modify the device on which this exemption is based, the company may have to submit a petition to modify the exemption. Part 543.7(d) states that a Part 543 exemption applies only to vehicles that belong to a line exempted under this part and equipped with the anti-theft device on which the line's exemption is based. Further, § 543.9(c)(2) provides for the submission of petitions to modify an exemption to permit the use of an antitheft device similar to but differing from the one specified in that exemption.

The agency wishes to minimize the administrative burden that § 543.9(c)(2) could place on exempted vehicle manufacturers and itself. The agency did not intend Part 543 to require the submission of a modification petition for every change to the components or design of an antitheft device. The significance of many such changes could be *de minimis*. Therefore, NHTSA suggests that if the manufacturer contemplates making any changes the effects of which might be characterized as *de minimis*, it should consult the agency before preparing and submitting a petition to modify.

Authority: 49 U.S.C. 33106; delegation of authority at 49 CFR 1.50.

Issued on: September 27, 2004.

Stephen R. Kratzke,

Associate Administrator for Rulemaking.

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