U.S. Department
of Transportation

**National Highway
Traffic Safety
Administration**

Administrator

1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

April 11, 2012

The Honorable Anna G. Eshoo
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman Eshoo:

Thank you for your letter, cosigned by Congressman Henry A. Waxman, regarding complaints from drivers concerning front suspension vibration, often referred to as a "shimmy," in Model Year (MY) 2005-2010 Jeep Wranglers.

Each year, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) receives tens of thousands of complaints from consumers concerning a multitude of vehicle and vehicle equipment concerns. We review these complaints, along with additional information such as Early Warning Reporting data and technical service bulletins (TSBs). We screen for potential safety-related defects, conduct follow-up and additional research as needed and, where appropriate, open formal safety defect investigations.

Under the Motor Vehicle Safety Act, NHTSA has the authority to act when it discovers a safety-related defect. NHTSA's pre-investigative screening process assesses whether a particular condition indicates the likelihood of a safety-related defect to warrant initiating a formal investigation. The assessment relies on a variety of factors including the nature of the condition in question, the frequency of the occurrence, and the severity of the consequences.

NHTSA has reviewed complaints concerning front suspension shimmy in the MY 2005-2010 Jeep Wrangler. Complainants typically report experiencing shimmy symptoms at speeds above 45 miles per hour (mph), frequently after traveling over a bump such as a pothole or an expansion joint in the roadway. As of this writing, NHTSA has identified 402 relevant complaints out of a total vehicle population of 542,134 MY 2005-2010 Jeep Wranglers. Of those, we have identified two possibly relevant crashes, one of which alleged non-fatal injuries. NHTSA continues to gather information on these complaints.

These complaints indicate that the shimmy tends to worsen over time, and that multiple and expensive repair attempts are frequently needed to resolve the shimmy. Nevertheless, the complaint narratives indicate that, while the condition is disconcerting to drivers, it does not result in loss of control such as the vehicle moving out of its travel lane.

The shimmy has been observed in vehicles equipped with a solid front axle and coil spring suspensions (as opposed to an independent or leaf spring front suspensions). NHTSA reviewed this condition in an earlier investigation of this type of vehicle in EA08-007 (MY 2005-2007 Ford F-250/F350 Superduty), found no basis for a safety recall at that time, and identified worn suspension components and inadequate front tire pressure as contributing factors.

Given the similarities of the conditions reviewed, as well as the nature of the complaints and other information received, NHTSA does not believe this particular condition indicates the likelihood of a safety-related defect that would warrant a formal investigation. NHTSA will continue to monitor this condition and will take additional action if further information or developments warrant.

A similar response has been sent to Congressman Waxman. If you have any further questions, please contact Nancy L. Lewis, Associate Administrator for Enforcement at (202)366-3217.

Sincerely,

David L. Strickland

Enclosures:
Questions and Answers
Technical Service Bulletins

Answers to Questions from Congresswoman Eshoo and Congressman Waxman

1. **How many consumer complaints has NHTSA received related to "death wobble," or underlying steering, suspension and powertrain problems in Jeep vehicles? Please provide a breakdown by model and model years.**

   NHTSA found a total of 402 complaints concerning front suspension shimmy in the MY 2005-2010 Jeep Wrangler as of March 21, 2012.

Model Year	No. of Complaints
2005	38
2006	54
2007	167
2008	112
2009	29
2010	2
Total	402

2. **Has NHTSA's review of Early Warning Reporting (EWR) data identified concerns regarding steering, suspension and powertrain problems in model year 2005-2010 Jeep vehicles? Please explain the review and the concerns identified.**

   EWR regulations require light vehicle manufacturers producing 5,000 or more vehicles annually to report U.S. and foreign death incidents, U.S. injury incidents and total counts of warranty claims, consumer complaints, property damage claims, and field reports (including dealer reports). In addition, these manufacturers are required to submit copies of non-dealer field reports. Our analysis of EWR includes an analysis of all these different types of data. We believe that reports of shimmy are most likely coded by manufacturers as steering or suspension components in EWR. Our review of non-dealer field reports tends to confirm this. However, because you inquired about powertrain problems, we also reviewed reports coded under that category.

   In 2006, NHTSA identified several reports concerning steering wheel shaking or instability after striking a bump or rough, uneven road surface that fell into either the steering or suspension component reporting category. This was characterized by rapid steering wheel oscillations that would subside when the vehicle's speed is reduced. There were no reported death or injury incidents in EWR for steering or suspension, and our analysis methods of the aggregate data did not identify the MY 2005-2010 Jeep Wranglers as outliers, or as vehicles

with an increasing trend of aggregate data. A parallel review and follow-up interviews of consumer complaints revealed no actionable information. Consequently, no investigative action was initiated at that time.

Since that time, Chrysler has reported three injury incidents for 2005-2010 Jeep Wrangler vehicles in EWR with a component of powertrain or suspension. Again, there are no death or injury incidents reported in EWR for 2005-2010 Jeep Wranglers for steering. As manufacturers are required to report any death or injury claim against or received by the manufacturer, such claims are unverified allegations and are not conclusive evidence of a defect. However, such claims may help NHTSA identify a possible defect.

This vehicle has a low production volume but a relatively high number of warranty claims. Chrysler provided a customer satisfaction notification (J31) which may be related to this issue. We found no other information to suggest a possible correlation between EWR data and front end shimmy in MY 2005-2010 Jeep Wranglers.

3. **Has NHTSA analyzed NASS or FARS data on rollovers or other crashes involving model year 2005-2010 Jeep vehicles to determine whether accidents, injuries and deaths may have been triggered by a sudden loss of vehicle control because of "death wobble" or underlying steering, suspension and powertrain problems? Please explain that analysis.**

   NHTSA reviewed NASS and FARS data sources as part of its response to this letter and found no patterns in either data source or indicators in cases involving these vehicles that would indicate a connection between front-end shimmy and single vehicle or rollover crash incidents in the MY 2005-2010 Jeep Wrangler.

4. **On NHTSA's website there are summaries of four technical service bulletins (TSBs) issued by Chrysler Group LLC that recommend a repair for Jeep Wranglers to address steering and linkage problems. Please provide a complete copy of these four TSBs as well as any others that concern steering, suspension, powertrain or other problems in Jeep Vehicles that are potentially related.**

   Copies of five TSBs that fall within these parameters are enclosed. Please note that these are subject to copyright restrictions.

   a. **Does the agency agree that the repairs recommended in these TSBs can prevent Jeep Wrangler "death wobble?" If not, what repairs does NHTSA believe are needed?**

      NHTSA does not opine on repair recommendations outside the scope of safety recalls or safety defect investigations.

      NHTSA does not believe this particular shimmy indicates the likelihood of a safety-related defect that would warrant a formal investigation.

b. **How does NHTSA ensure that TSBs are disseminated and used effectively?**

TSBs are communications by a manufacturer to its dealer network and other automotive repair service providers to address a variety of issues concerning a motor vehicle. Only a small fraction of such issues touch on safety concerns within NHTSA's authority. The contents, use, and dissemination of TSBs are within the control of the manufacturers.

NHTSA requires manufacturers to retain records that could be requested during an investigation, including TSBs, which NHTSA uses as a screening tool.

c. **With many Jeep vehicles affected by "death wobble" no longer under warranty or soon subject to expiring warranties, how can NHTSA help ensure Jeep owners have access to necessary repairs?**

The issue of a post-warranty repair is different from the issue of a recall for a safety-related defect. NHTSA orders safety-related recalls when appropriate, regardless of manufacturer warranties. 49 U.S.C. § 30120 sets forth remedies manufacturers must provide for safety-related defects, which include repairing or replacing the vehicle or refunding the purchase price, less an allowance for depreciation.

d. **How does NHTSA determine which TSBs are published or summarized on NHTSA's website and how detailed such summaries should be?**

TSBs that directly relate to motor vehicles or equipment under investigation by NHTSA are posted on NHTSA's web site in their entirety. Due to copyright restrictions, NHTSA provides summaries rather than copies of other potentially safety-related TSBs that do not relate directly to an investigation.

e. **Does NHTSA require, or is it common practice for, manufacturers to maintain indexes of TSBs organized by category or model, model year and vehicle component? If so, why are such indexes not available on manufacturer or NHTSA websites so consumers can identify TSBs on their vehicle?**

As described in response to 4b above, TSBs are manufacturer communications. NHTSA does not control how they are formatted or organized.

5. **We are aware of at least one draft consumer satisfaction notification issued by Chrysler LLC, Customer Satisfaction Notification J34, encouraging owners of certain model year 2007-2010 Jeep Wranglers with right hand steering to visit a local dealership to replace the steering damper and mounting bracket.**

a. **How does NHTSA determine whether a consumer service campaign or consumer notification is necessary, or whether one undertaken by a company is sufficient?**

NHTSA regulates safety recall notifications. Unlike safety recall notices, customer satisfaction notifications are voluntary communications from manufacturers, which may or may not concern safety-related issues. NHTSA reviews these notifications as part of its routine screening process. In the event that a customer satisfaction notification indicates a possible safety defect, we apply additional scrutiny to assess whether an investigation is warranted.

b. **There are few right hand steering vehicles in the United States.**

   i. **Is NHTSA aware of any customer satisfaction notifications and/or owner notification letters addressing steering problems in Jeep Wranglers with left hand steering or other Jeep models? If so, please provide them.**

   Based on our most recent review, NHTSA is not aware of any other such customer satisfaction campaigns or related notification letters in the MY 2005-2010 Jeep Wrangler with left hand steering or other Jeep models.

   ii. **Is NHTSA aware of similar Jeep steering problems identified or addressed by safety authorities in countries where right hand steering is standard? Please explain.**

   As a part of its Early Warning Reporting, Chrysler has reported three foreign campaigns to NHTSA pertaining to the MY 2005-2010 Jeep Wrangler. None appear to be related to steering problems, front suspension vibration or shimmy.

c. **The notice indicates that repairs will be paid for or reimbursed by the manufacturer. How does NHTSA determine whether a manufacturer is required to reimburse owners or pay for a repair? Please provide any guidance NHTSA offers to manufacturers.**

NHTSA does not provide guidance to manufacturers with respect to vehicle repairs beyond the scope of safety recalls.

In the event of a safety-related recall, manufacturers are required to provide certain remedies without charge. Specifically, under 49 U.S.C. § 30120 a manufacturer is required to remedy a defect or noncompliance in any of the following ways it chooses: by repairing the vehicle, by replacing the vehicle with an identical or reasonably equivalent vehicle, or by refunding the purchase price, less a reasonable allowance for depreciation.

d. **How does NHTSA ensure notification and/or reimbursement is provided when manufacturer ownership changes, such as the transition of Jeep brand ownership from DaimlerChrysler Motors Company LLC to Chrysler LLC, to Chrysler Group LLC after the company emerged from bankruptcy in 2009. Please provide any guidance NHTSA offers to manufacturers.**

When ownership changes, there are a number of legal options that NHTSA considers, depending on how, specifically, the change in ownership occurs. With regard to the Daimler-Chrysler bankruptcy, language in the sale order required the purchaser to assume certain liabilities of the debtors, including notification, remedy and obligations under 49 U.S.C. § 30116 through 30120 relating to vehicles manufactured by the debtors that had a defect related to motor vehicle safety or did not comply with applicable motor vehicle safety standards.

6. **Has NHTSA conducted an Issues Evaluation of "death wobble" in Jeep vehicles or any other review to determine whether to open an investigation? Please provide copies of any such evaluation. Does the agency believe a safety recall or consumer satisfaction campaign for affected Jeep models is warranted?**

   NHTSA conducted an Issue Evaluation of reports of shimmy in 1997-2006 Wranglers. Issue Evaluations are internal, pre-decisional, deliberative process that NHTSA does not release. 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(5) protects this information from public release.

   NHTSA has not concluded that a safety recall for shimmy on these Jeep Wrangler models is warranted. A "consumer satisfaction campaign" is a decision made by the manufacturer, and the agency does not take a position on the circumstances under which the manufacturer should consider such a campaign. NHTSA will continue to monitor this condition and will take additional action if further information or developments warrant.