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 Document 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: February 10, 1998.

C. Glenn Clinton,

Chief, District Operations—South Sacramento, California.

[FR Doc. 98–4675 Filed 2–23–98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4910–22–M

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Denial of Motor Vehicle Defect Petition

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

ACTION: Denial of petition for a defect investigation.

SUMMARY: This notice sets forth the reasons for the denial of a petition submitted to NHTSA under 49 U.S.C. 30162, requesting that the agency commence a proceeding to determine the existence of a defect related to motor vehicle safety.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dr. George Chiang, Office of Defects Investigation, NHTSA, 400 Seventh Street, SW, Washington, DC 20590. Telephone: (202) 366–5206.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Mr. Walter E. Bull of Prescott, Arizona, submitted a petition dated December 31, 1997, requesting that an investigation be initiated to determine whether early model Ford Explorer sport utility vehicles contain a defect related to motor vehicle safety within the meaning of 49 U.S.C. Chapter 301. The petition alleges that early model Ford Explorer sport utility vehicles develop heavy lateral vibrations at speeds above 55 mph and when encountering bumps at low speeds. The petition further alleges that these vibrations could possibly cause loss of vehicle control.

A review of agency data files, including information reported to the Auto Safety Hotline by consumers, indicates that, in addition to the petition, there were 22 complaints concerning vehicle vibration, shaking, and shimmy at certain high speeds in model year (MY) 1991–1994 Ford Explorer vehicles, allegedly caused by defective engine mounts. No loss of vehicle control, and no crashes or injuries were reported. Of the 22 complaints, five are MY1994, five are MY1993, ten are MY1992, and two are MY1991 vehicles. Ford Motor Company (Ford) has manufactured approximately 1,137,000 MY1991–1994 Explorers.

The agency interviewed four recent complainants who filed reports about the subject vehicles and confirmed that the drivers felt vibration/shake in the seat and floor at certain speeds but little or no vibration in the steering wheel. They described the severity of vibration as one which would tip over a full cup of coffee when the cup is placed on the floor. One complainant had not fixed the engine mounts as of January 14, 1998, and the other three had sold or traded their Explorers without getting the vibration problems fixed. One sold her vehicle with over 72,000 miles, one sold at about 10,000 miles, one traded at about 8,000 miles, and one still has his vehicle which has about 50,000 miles now.

Ford has issued three Technical Service Bulletins to address the vibration/shake issue on MY1991–1994 Ford Explorers. One bulletin issued on September 1, 1994, BC1431940902, informs dealers of the availability of a new engine mount with revised insulator stiffening to correct a lateral shake problem on the subject vehicles. The other two bulletins, issued on February 12, 1996, Article Nos. 96–4–15 and 96–4–17, address vibration/shake in the seat and/or floor at speeds above 50 mph and peaking near 65 mph on certain MY1991–1994 Explorer vehicles. An ''aftershake'' condition may also exist when driving over a bump at speeds less than 45 mph. To reduce or eliminate the vibration/shake problem, these latter bulletins advise dealers to install revised LH and RH engine mounts as addressed in the 1994 bulletins and also to install a rear axle-to-frame lateral shock absorber kit.

The vibration/shake in the MY1991–1994 Explorers is apparently caused by inadequately designed engine mounts which allow the engine to move laterally at certain driving speeds. The vibration/shake is primarily limited to the seat and floor. When this occurs, the driver is able to control the vehicle and to either increase or decrease the vehicle's speed to eliminate the vibration. This is evidenced by no reports of loss of vehicle control, crashes, or injuries reported to NHTSA.

For the reasons presented above, it is unlikely that NHTSA would issue an order for the notification and remedy of a safety-related defect in the subject vehicles at the conclusion of the investigation requested in the petition. Therefore, in view of the need to allocate and prioritize NHTSA's limited resources to best accomplish the agency's safety mission, the petition is denied.

Authority: 49 U.S.C. 30162(d); delegations of authority at CFR 1.50 and 501.8.

Issued on: February 9, 1998.

Kenneth N. Weinstein,

Associate Administrator for Safety Assurance.

[FR Doc. 98–4626 Filed 2–23–98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4910–59–M

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Denial of Motor Vehicle Defect Petition

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

ACTION: Denial of petition for a defect investigation.

SUMMARY: This notice sets forth the reasons for the denial of a petition submitted to NHTSA under 49 U.S.C. 30162, requesting that the agency commence a proceeding to determine the existence of a defect related to motor vehicle safety.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dr. George Chiang, Office of Defects Investigation, NHTSA, 400 Seventh Street, SW, Washington, DC 20590. Telephone: (202) 366–5206.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Mr. and Mrs. Scott Montreuil of Ramsey, Minnesota, submitted a petition dated October 1, 1997, requesting that an investigation be initiated to determine whether 1993 Chrysler Jeep Grand Cherokees contain a defect related to motor vehicle safety within the meaning of 49 U.S.C. Chapter 301. The petition alleges that 1993 Chrysler Jeep Grand Cherokees have a defective viscous coupling that could cause the steering to bind and lock up, and possibly affect the vehicle's braking.

Although not all Jeep Grand Cherokees utilize a viscous coupling, some 1993 through 1995 Jeep Grand Cherokees are equipped with a Quadra-Trac transfer case. An integral part of the Quadra-Trac transfer case is its viscous coupling, a speed-sensitive device that controls torque output between the front and rear drive shafts.

The housing of the viscous coupling contains high viscosity silicone fluid and specially engineered metal plates splined alternately to an inner and outer drum. When there is a difference in front-to-rear axle speed, such as when the rear wheels slip, the resulting friction between the metal plates increases the temperature inside the unit. This causes the fluid to expand, building pressure that moves the plates together. This occurs almost instantaneously in two modes: the ''shear'' mode, when momentary speed differences occur such as in cornering or tight turns, causing the plates to move near each other, or the ''hump'' mode, when high-speed differences occur for a longer period of time, such as in deep snow or on off-road trails, causing the plates to lock and the front and rear drive shafts to turn at the same speed for maximum traction. As traction is gained, the fluid cools, and the plates separate.

When the viscous coupling fails, it may remain in one of the above two modes all the time, regardless of whether there is a difference between front-and-rear axle speed. If the coupling fails in the ''hump'' mode on dry pavement, it may cause vehicle hopping/bucking during turns, resulting in rapid wear of tires.

NHTSA drove a Jeep Grand Cherokee with a simulated failure of the viscous coupling in the ''hump'' mode on dry pavement at various speeds. Some hopping/bucking was experienced while the vehicle executed turns. However, no steering or braking problems were experienced at any time.

A review of agency data files, including information reported to the Auto Safety Hotline by consumers, indicated that, aside from the petition, there were no other reports concerning failure or malfunction of the viscous coupling in 1993 Jeep Grand Cherokees. There was a report pertaining to transmission lockup when the engine was started, but this was not related to a failure of the viscous coupling.

Chrysler Corporation has received 40 complaints concerning failure or malfunction of the viscous coupling in the transfer case of 1993 Jeep Grand Cherokees. Five of these complaints report handling problems, such as vehicle hopping during turns. The remaining 35 complaints are solely related to financial assistance issues. No crashes or injuries were reported.

The agency has analyzed available information concerning the problem alleged in the petition. Based on its understanding of viscous couplings, NHTSA believes that the failure or malfunction of the viscous coupling in the subject vehicles cannot cause lockup of the steering or adversely affect the brake system.

For the reasons presented above, it is unlikely that NHTSA would issue an order for the notification and remedy of a safety-related defect in the subject vehicles at the conclusion of the investigation requested in the petition. Therefore, in view of the need to allocate and prioritize NHTSA's limited resources to best accomplish the agency's safety mission, the petition is denied.

Authority: 49 U.S.C. 30162(d); delegations of authority at CFR 1.50 and 501.8.

Issued on: January 29, 1998.

Kenneth N. Weinstein,

Associate Administrator for Safety Assurance.

[FR Doc. 98–4627 Filed 2–23–98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4910–59–M

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Research and Special Programs Administration

[Contract DTRS–56–96–C–0010]

Quarterly Performance Review Meeting on the Contract ''Detection of Mechanical Damage in Pipelines''

AGENCY: Research and Special Programs Administration (RSPA), DOT.

ACTION: Notice of meeting.

SUMMARY: RSPA invites the pipeline industry, in-line inspection (''smart pig'') vendors, and the general public to the next quarterly performance review meeting of progress on the contract ''Detection of Mechanical Damage in Pipelines.'' The meeting is open to everyone, and no registration is required. This contract is being performed by Battelle Memorial Institute (Battelle), along with the Southwest Research Institute and Iowa State University. The contract is a research and development contract to develop electromagnetic in-line inspection technologies to detect and characterize mechanical damage and stress corrosion cracking. The meeting will cover a review of the overall project plan, the status of the contract tasks, progress made during the past quarter, and projected activity for the next quarter.

DATES: The next quarterly performance review meeting will be held on March 17, 1998, beginning at 1:00 p.m. and ending around 5:00 p.m.

ADDRESSES: The quarterly review meeting will be held at the Embassy Suites Downtown Salt Lake City, 110 West 600 South, Salt Lake City, Utah. The hotel's telephone number is (801) 359–7800.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Lloyd W. Ulrich, Contracting Officer's Technical Representative, Office of Pipeline Safety, telephone: (202) 366–4556, FAX: (202) 366–4566, e-mail: lloyd.ulrich@rspa.dot.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

I. Background

RSPA is conducting quarterly meetings on the status of its contract, ''Detection of Mechanical Damage in Pipelines'' (Contract DTRS–56–96–C–0010), because in-line inspection research is of immediate interest to the pipeline industry and in-line inspection vendors. RSPA will continue this practice throughout the life of the contract, which may be three years. The research contract with Battelle is a cooperative effort between the Gas Research Institute (GRI) and DOT, with GRI providing technical guidance. The meetings allow disclosure of the results to interested parties and provide an opportunity for interested parties to ask Battelle questions concerning the research. Attendance at this meeting is open to all and does not require advance registration or advance notice to RSPA.

We specifically want that segment of the pipeline industry involved with in-line inspection to be aware of the status of this contract. To ensure that a cross section of industry is well represented at these meetings, we have invited the major domestic in-line inspection company (Tuboscope Vetco Pipeline Services) and the following pipeline industry trade associations: American Petroleum Institute, Interstate Natural Gas Association of America, and the American Gas Association. Each has named an engineering/technical representative who, along with the GRI representative providing technical guidance, form the Industry Review Team (IRT) for the contract.

The original objective was to open each quarterly performance review meeting to the public. The first quarterly meeting was conducted on October 22, 1996, in Washington, DC. However, preparing for a formal briefing each quarter takes a considerable amount of time and resources on Battelle's part that could be better used to conduct the research. Therefore, Battelle requested and RSPA concurred that future public meetings would be conducted semiannually. The Salt Lake City meeting is the first of these semiannual meetings. Conducting public meetings semiannually will provide all interested parties with a sufficient update of