

Japan may add noise to quiet hybrid cars for safety

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A customer admires a Honda Motor's hybrid vehicle at a showroom in Tokyo. Japan's near-silent hybrid cars have been called dangerous by the vision-impaired and some users, prompting a government review on whether to add a noise-making device, according to an official.

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The petrol-electric vehicles, which in recent months have become the country's top-selling autos, hum along almost soundlessly when they are switched from fuel to battery mode.

"We have received opinions from automobile users and vision-impaired

people that they feel hybrid vehicles are dangerous," a transport ministry official said.

"Blind people depend on sounds when they walk, but there are no engine sounds from [hybrid vehicles](#) when running at low speed" and on the electric motor, he said.

The ministry has launched a panel of scholars, vision-impaired groups, consumers, police and the [automobile industry](#) to discuss the matter.

"They decided to consider introducing a sound-making function" in petrol-electric hybrids when the 13-member panel held its first meeting Thursday, the official said.

They have not decided on what kind of sound should be used, only that it should induce a response of caution, he said.

"On the other hand, we should pay attention to residents (along roads) as hybrids are excellent in reducing noise," the official added.

The panel is expected to draw up a report by the end of the year. Its proposal will be discussed at the ministry's committee on automobile safety before it could be drafted into legislation.

[Toyota Motor](#) launched the world's most popular hybrid, the Prius, in 1997.

A cheaper, revamped [Prius](#), rolled out in Japan in late May, has been a huge hit, drawing orders for 200,000 units, according to Toyota. It recently became the best-selling car in Japan's domestic market.

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