

# Gov't set to ban texting by truck, bus drivers

March 31 2010, By KEN THOMAS , Associated Press Writer

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(AP) -- The Transportation Department on Wednesday proposed a ban on text messaging at the wheel by interstate truck and bus drivers, following up on its call to reduce distractions that lead to crashes.

The proposal would make permanent an interim ban announced in January by Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, applying to [drivers](#) of buses and commercial trucks over 10,000 pounds. The drivers could face civil or criminal penalties.

The proposal "keeps our commitment to making our roads safer by reducing the threat of distracted driving," LaHood said.

As navigation systems, cell phones and mobile electronics have become ubiquitous in cars and trucks, safety advocates and the government have pushed for restrictions. The Transportation Department reports that 5,870 people were killed and 515,000 injured in 2008 in crashes connected to [driver distraction](#), often involving mobile devices or cell phones.

Trucking and bus industry officials support the texting ban and many companies already have policies in place against texting behind the wheel. The government prohibition doesn't apply to onboard devices that allow dispatchers to send text messages to truck drivers, but industry officials say most of the devices have mechanisms preventing their use while a truck is moving.

Twenty states and the District of Columbia already prohibit all drivers

from texting behind the wheel, according to the Governors Highway Safety Association. Another nine states restrict texting by novice drivers.

The government, industry and safety organizations have found common ground on texting and driving, concerned that typing out a message on a mobile device can take a driver's eyes off the road for a dangerous number of seconds.

Research by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration shows that drivers who send and receive text messages take their eyes off the road for an average of 4.6 seconds out of every 6 seconds while texting. At 55 miles per hour, that means the driver is traveling the length of a football field without looking at the road.

Texting has grown exponentially in recent years and become a favorite form of communication among teens. The wireless industry association CTIA reported that the number of text messages sent by its members' customers increased from 32.6 billion in the first six months of 2005 to 740 billion in the first six months of 2009.

John Walls, a CTIA spokesman, said the group supports a ban on texting for all drivers: "Those are two completely incompatible behaviors - texting and safe driving."

The public has until May 3 to comment on the Transportation Department's proposed ban, and after reviewing comments the department can issue its new rule.

President Barack Obama signed an executive order directing federal employees not to use text messaging while driving government-owned vehicles or with government-owned equipment, effective at the end of last year.

Congress has also shown interest in curbing distracted driving. Democratic Sens. Charles Schumer of New York and Robert Menendez of New Jersey have introduced legislation to urge states to pass laws banning texting by all drivers. The bill would reduce federal highway aid by 25 percent to states that fail to enact bans.

**More information:** Transportation Department:  
<http://www.distraction.gov>

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