

Transportation Chief to Study Texting Ban

by *The-Wall-Street-Journal*

WASHINGTON -- Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood said Tuesday that he would support banning motorists from texting behind the wheel, but acknowledged further study was needed to find effective ways to enforce such a ban.

"If it were up to me, I would ban drivers from texting, but unfortunately, laws aren't always enough," Mr. LaHood said Tuesday at a news conference.

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Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood discusses how to combat distracted driving, including text messaging behind the wheel, Tuesday in Washington.

Mr. LaHood didn't propose any new rules but said that "following next month's summit, I plan to announce a list of concrete steps we will take to make drivers think twice about taking their eyes off the road for any reason." Senior transportation officials, lawmakers, safety advocates and law-enforcement officials are expected to take part in the summit, which will focus on the hazards posed by cellphone use, text messaging and other activities that distract drivers.

Mr. LaHood on Tuesday cited a train collision in September in Los Angeles that killed 25 and a recent incident near his hometown of Peoria, Ill., where a 17-year-old was killed when she drove off the road while texting. In the rail incident, investigators found that the operator of the commuter train was repeatedly texting in the moments before it slammed into a freight train.

The use of cellphones and other handheld devices has become so ubiquitous that one of the first questions investigators seek to answer in many accident investigations these days is whether drivers were distracted when accidents occurred.

Oregon and New Hampshire recently joined 14 other states that have banned text messaging while driving, and New York is likely to follow suit soon, according to the Governors Highway Safety Association. But these laws are difficult to enforce because police often can't issue citations unless drivers have been pulled over for other infractions. Six states and the District of Columbia ban talking on handheld cellphones while driving, but no state has banned all forms of cellphone use while driving.

"We're really where we were with drunk driving in the 1980s," said Jonathan Adkins, a spokesman for the GHSA, an influential safety-advocacy group. "We know there's a problem, but we don't know the solutions yet."

The trade group for the wireless phone industry said in a statement Tuesday that "texting while driving is incompatible with safe driving" and that it supports "state and local statutes that ban this activity while driving." But Steve Largent, president of CTIA-The Wireless Association, said "a law is not enough" and called for more efforts to "educate consumers about the potential risks of distracted driving."

Sen. Charles Schumer (D., N.Y.) has introduced legislation that would withhold a portion of federal highway funds from states that fail to ban texting while driving. On Tuesday, he called Mr. LaHood's summit "a strong step forward in what must be a nationwide effort to kick the nation of this deadly habit."

The GHSA opposes Mr. Schumer's bill. "We think states can handle their own problems without federal mandates," Mr. Adkins said.

State and local transit officials have increasingly adopted prohibitions on employees using electronic devices while operating trains or buses since the Los Angeles rail crash and some other recent incidents where drivers were faulted for using electronic devices. In May, a trolley driver in Boston was text messaging his girlfriend

when he ran into another trolley, leaving passengers injured.
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