

Remarks for
Secretary Ray LaHood
Motor Carriers Distracted Driving Press Event
January 26, 2010

Good morning. Thank you for coming.

When the U.S. Department of Transportation sponsored the nation's first summit on distracted driving last fall, we promised the American people the federal government would do everything in its power to send a clear message that texting, talking, and driving are potentially lethal activities with very serious consequences.

Today I'm announcing the latest in a series of actions DOT is taking to curb distracted driving and help make our roads much safer for everyone.

I've directed the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, led by Administrator Anne Ferro, to use its existing authority to prohibit commercial truck and bus drivers from texting while driving, using any handheld cellphone or other device that takes a driver's attention off the road.

This guidance has far-reaching implications for inter-state drivers who carry cargo or passengers for a living.

Today we're sending a strong message: We don't merely *EXPECT* you to share the road responsibly with other travelers – we *REQUIRE* you to do so.

This guidance is effective immediately. It applies to inter-state truck drivers. It also generally applies to commercial bus or van drivers who carry more than 8 passengers.

To put this dangerous behavior in perspective, researchers at Virginia Tech found that truck drivers who send text messages on a cell phone are about 23

times more likely to get into some type of crash or near-miss than drivers who keep their eyes on the road.

By including interstate bus operators in this decision, we're taking an important new step to protect ordinary citizens who rely on their drivers to deliver them safely to their destinations.

The next time your church group or theater group hops on a bus, you can rest easier knowing their drivers are legally forbidden to take their eyes off the road to send or retrieve a text message.

And you can be assured that those who put passengers at risk will face serious consequences.

While we know that all distracted driving laws must depend in part on drivers using their own good judgment and common sense, we also know that penalties act as a deterrent.

Therefore, any truck or bus driver who violates the Federal regulations mentioned in this guidance is subject to a civil and/or criminal penalty up to 2,750 dollars.

I'm proud of this ground-breaking effort to help make America's highways and back roads safer from coast to coast.

In the months ahead, we'll propose additional legal remedies and develop new tools that will help us work alongside the law enforcement community, safety advocates, researchers, and others, to find new ways to raise awareness and bring an end to the terrible dangers posed by distracted driving.

Thank you.