



MEMBER ALERT

TO: ABA Operator Members

FROM: President & CEO Peter Pantuso

DATE: October 6, 2009

RE: Government Seeks Tougher Laws On Distracted Driving

Department of Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood announced plans last week to seek recommendations to restrict cell phone use and texting for drivers across all modes of surface transportation, including buses, except in emergencies. The announcement, which came as a result of DOT's Distracted Driving Summit, will also likely lead to DOT support for draft congressional legislation to require states to develop, implement, and enforce distracted driving laws.

The announcement comes on the heels of a report finding that 5,870 people were killed and 515,000 were injured last year in crashes connected to driver distraction, often involving mobile devices or cell phones. Currently 18 states and the District have bans on cell phone use while driving, although only seven ban texting while driving. As a first step, LaHood stated that President Barack Obama signed an executive order October 1st banning all federal workers from texting while driving on government business, driving government vehicles, using government equipment, and transportation providers specifically under federal jurisdiction for their operations (e.g. Federal Railroad Administration, Federal Aviation Administration).

ABA supports these safety initiatives, and the safety culture of ABA and its member operators has long been supportive of such bans. Indeed, ABA's pre-trip passenger safety messaging video instructs passengers, not drivers, to dial 911 in case of emergency. Only in extreme emergencies should drivers ever use a cell phone while operating motorcoaches, and that hands-free use of cell phones is no better than hand-held cell phone use, as cognitive distraction is the safety issue in question.

This is still an emerging issue and more research will continue to be developed and released to help aid safety on the nation's highways. ABA will continue to monitor developments and keep you up-to-date as issues warrant.

As always, please feel free to call me at 202-218-7229 or email me at ppantuso@buses.org if you have any questions.