



# Governor Baker Proposes Ban On Handheld Cellphone Use While Driving

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By Bob Salsberg



BOSTON (AP) — A wide-ranging traffic safety proposal filed Tuesday by Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker would ban drivers from using handheld cellphones and give police increased power to enforce the state's seatbelt requirements.

The bill also calls for mandatory speed limit reductions in highway construction zones, new measures to curb drunken driving and the use of equipment that could better protect bicyclists and pedestrians from deadly crashes involving heavy trucks.

The Baker administration cited figures showing that 1,820 people died and 15,662 people suffered serious injuries on the state's roadways between 2012 and 2016.

"Keeping the Commonwealth's networks of roads as safe as possible for everyone using them is one of our administration's top public safety priorities," Baker, a Republican, said in a statement.

Massachusetts currently outlaws texting by all motorists and cellphone use of any kind by teen drivers. But all other motorists are allowed to hold their cellphones while driving — as long as they're not sending text messages.

The state Senate [approved](#) a handheld cellphone ban in each of the past two legislative sessions, but the bills never came up for final votes in the House of Representatives.

Under the governor's legislation, drivers could use hands-free technology to talk on their phones or perform other functions but would not be allowed to touch their devices "except to perform a single tap or swipe to activate, deactivate, or initiate hands-free mode."

Proponents say the hands-free imperative would not only reduce distracted driving crashes but also make it easier for police to enforce the existing ban on texting, as it's often difficult for officers to distinguish whether a motorist is actually texting or doing something else with their phones, such as punching in a phone number.

Sixteen other U.S. states ban drivers from holding cellphones, including the neighboring states of Connecticut, New Hampshire, New York and Vermont.

Baker's proposal envisions what is known as a primary seatbelt law, which would allow police to stop a car solely on the basis of a driver or passenger not wearing seatbelts.

Under current law, police can only ticket for a seatbelt violation if a vehicle is pulled over for some other reason, such as speeding.

Thirty-four states have primary seatbelt laws, according to the Governors Highway Safety Association.

The bill additionally calls for eliminating "inconsistencies" in state law by extending rules for ignition interlock devices, which prevent a car from starting until the driver passes an alcohol breath test, to include people who have only one drunken driving conviction.

Baker would require first offenders who apply for hardship licenses so they can continue driving after their license was suspended to use an interlock device for at least six

months — a mandate that now applies to people with two or more convictions for operating under the influence.

Noting that 14 road workers have been killed in crashes at highway construction sites in recent years, the legislation would also enable state transportation officials to impose temporary, but mandatory, speed limits in work zones.

Yet another provision would require all state-owned trucks weighing over 10,000 pounds (4,536 kilograms) to be equipped with side guards, convex mirrors and cross-over mirrors by Jan. 1, 2020, and for the same devices to be installed on heavy trucks operated by state and municipal contractors by 2022. The equipment reduces the risk of a bicyclist, motorcyclist or pedestrian being caught in the driver's blind spot and being pulled under the rear wheels of a truck.

MassBike, an advocacy group, says nearly 30 percent of bicycle fatalities in Massachusetts since 2010 have involved large trucks.

The Massachusetts Vision Zero Coalition, an organization that advocates for policies that make roads and highways safer, praised the governor's bill Tuesday as "an important first step" in reducing crashes that result in death or serious injury.