

# Carriers Respond To Bans On Texting While Driving

The four major wireless operators agree that the practice is dangerous, but not all believe national legislation is the best way to solve the problem.

By Marin Perez, [InformationWeek](#)

Momentum is building for a national ban on texting while driving, and the major U.S. wireless carriers agree something needs to be done, but differ on the best course for addressing this issue.

Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., and a few fellow Democrats introduced legislation Wednesday that would force states to ban texting while operating a moving vehicle or face cuts in annual federal highway funds. The ban would not just concern text-happy teenagers, as it would also apply to the mobile professional trying to crank out a few e-mails on a BlackBerry at a stop light.

"We support federal legislation to ban texting and e-mailing while driving," said Steven Zipperstein, Verizon Wireless VP, in a statement. "This approach is a logical extension of our previous breaks with other wireless companies to support state-wide legislation banning texting and e-mailing while driving."

The proposed ban comes after a recent study released by the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute which said texting while driving increased truck drivers' risk of crash by more than 23 times. AT&T, the second largest U.S. carrier, said it has not reviewed the specific legislation, but in general it is supportive of laws that forbid the practice.

John Taylor, Sprint Nextel's public affairs manager, said the legislation is well-intentioned, but it likely won't get to the root issue of changing driver behavior. A national standard would ease confusion for Sprint customers, but Taylor said his experiences with law enforcement and educators suggest the best way to tackle this problem may be through better driver education. The company created the Focus On Driving program to provide teachers and school administrators with a free, interactive way to educate youths about avoiding distractions.

"We've got to figure out a way to stop this behavior because it's irresponsible and reckless," Taylor said of texting while driving. "You would think anyone with common sense would know that, but obviously that's not the case."

T-Mobile, the nation's fourth-largest carrier, said it does not comment on specific legislation but it encourages responsible driving. The potential ban could be a boon for Bluetooth headset makers, speech-recognition companies like Nuance, and products like ilane which enable users to hear and audibly respond to e-mails in a car.

Fourteen states and the District of Columbia already have laws in place that ban sending SMS messages or e-mails while operating a moving vehicle, but these bans can be difficult to enforce. California banned the practice at the beginning of the year, and statistics from the California Highway Patrol show police have not ticketed many offenders because it is relatively easy for motorists to conceal sending text messages.

