

# REFERENCE SERIES: Transportation in Connecticut

## ARTICLE NO. 13c Texting Enforcement Ban

### NHTSA Highway Safety Mini-Series

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This simple guide is part of a mini-series that provides insight on National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) programs relating to Connecticut's transportation system. The article focuses on the Connecticut Department of Transportation's (CT DOT) anticipated initiatives under the Texting Enforcement Ban Demonstration Project.

Special thanks are given to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration for support of programs described in this mini-series.

#### [Overview](#)

#### [High Visibility Enforcement \(HVE\)](#)

#### [Goals and Objectives](#)

#### [Project Timeline](#)

#### [Pilot Area](#)

#### [Activities and Partners](#)

- Expert Panel
- Participating Law Enforcement Agencies
- Key Partners

#### [Data Collection and Analysis](#)

#### [Other Notes and Resources](#)

## Overview

Mobile phone use is an ever expanding phenomenon, the likes of which are unprecedented in terms of technological advancements and ubiquity among our society. Teenagers and new drivers have only known a world where information and communication were never more than an arm's length away. Teenagers are not the only demographic group to be in constant use of mobile devices, however. From a highway safety perspective, this phenomenon poses challenges to safe driving unlike any other ever experienced.

Here in Connecticut the issue of distracted driving and mobile phone use, specifically texting are especially pertinent. The prevalence of accidents, including those with injuries and fatalities, believed to be linked with driver cell phone use, including texting, is becoming a daily experience. The enormity of this subject has not been lost on our legislature or law enforcement community. Connecticut employs one of the most stringent mobile phone laws in the country with regard to use of these devices while driving. Law enforcement has shown a concerted effort to identify, stop and ticket offenders.

CT DOT Highway Safety Information Online: [www.ct.gov/dot](http://www.ct.gov/dot)  
Navigate to Programs and Services > Travel Resources > Safety

### Highlight:

39 states, the District of Columbia, and Guam ban text messaging for all drivers and 10 states, the District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands prohibit all drivers from using handheld cell phones while driving.

Alabama  
Alaska  
Arizona  
Arkansas  
California  
Colorado  
Connecticut  
Delaware  
District of  
Columbia  
Florida  
Georgia  
Guam  
Hawaii  
Idaho  
Illinois  
Indiana  
Iowa

Kansas  
Kentucky  
Louisiana  
Maine  
Maryland  
Massachusetts  
Michigan  
Minnesota  
Mississippi  
Missouri  
Montana  
Nebraska  
Nevada  
New Hampshire  
New Jersey  
New Mexico  
New York  
North Carolina  
North Dakota  
Ohio  
Oklahoma  
Oregon  
Pennsylvania  
Rhode Island  
South Carolina  
South Dakota  
Tennessee  
Texas  
Utah  
Vermont  
Virgin Islands  
Virginia  
Washington  
West Virginia  
Wisconsin  
Wyoming

-NHTSA distraction.gov

## **High Visibility Enforcement (HVE)**

Together with law enforcement and other traffic safety partners, the Connecticut Highway Safety Office (HSO) led the nation in proving that a High Visibility Enforcement (HVE) model, proven successful in other areas of highway safety, could be applied to distracted driving during the Distracted Driving Enforcement Program (DDEP) “Phone in One Hand. Ticket in the Other”. This successful demonstration project resulted in a 57% reduction in drivers using hand held cell phones in Hartford. Additionally, a 72% decline in drivers who were texting while driving was observed in Hartford, as documented in the *NHTSA Traffic Safety Facts Research Note – July 2011*.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) recently awarded \$275,000 to the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CT DOT) to conduct a Texting Enforcement Ban Demonstration Project under the management of its HSO. This pilot project was awarded to only two of the thirty-nine states that qualified to apply. This project will build upon lessons learned during the “Phone in One Hand. Ticket in the Other” campaign of the Distracted Driving Enforcement Program (DDEP).

## **Goal and Objectives**

Anecdotal evidence and citation data provided by law enforcement confirms that texting while driving continues to occur at unprecedented levels on Connecticut roadways. For this reason, Connecticut proposed the Texting Enforcement Ban Demonstration Project to address the pressing and deadly highway safety issue. In doing so, the CT DOT HSO hopes to provide a second model for the nation for High Visibility Enforcement (HVE). The following program goals and objectives were identified in the action plan to NHTSA:

- identifying successful texting
- enforcement strategies;
- increasing motorist understanding of the
- dangers associated with texting while driving;
- decreasing the prevalence of texting while driving; and
- decreasing the incidence of distracted
- driving crashes.

Highlight:

Distracted driving is any activity that could divert a person's attention away from the primary task of driving. All distractions endanger driver, passenger, and bystander safety. These types of distractions include:

- Texting
- Using a cell phone or smartphone
- Eating and drinking
- Talking to passengers
- Grooming
- Reading, including maps
- Using a navigation system
- Watching a video
- Adjusting a radio, CD player, or MP3 player

But, because text messaging requires visual, manual, and cognitive attention from the driver, it is by far the most alarming distraction.

-NHTSA distraction.gov

Highlight:

Q: Sending or reading one text is pretty quick, unlike a phone conversation - wouldn't that be okay?

A: Texting is the most alarming distraction because it involves manual, visual, and cognitive distraction simultaneously. Sending or reading a text takes your eyes off the road for 4.6 seconds. At 55 mph, that's like driving the length of an entire football field, blindfolded. It's extraordinarily dangerous.

-NHTSA distraction.gov

## **Project Timeline**

The pilot project was officially awarded to the CT DOT HSO on September 24, 2012 and will take place over a twenty-four month period. This timeframe includes all enforcement periods, project analysis and reporting. A project kick-off press event including local, state and federal officials will be held to promote the project and begin the earned media component. The CT DOT HSO and partnering law enforcement agencies anticipates executing the HVE periods during the following months:

- June 2013
- October 2013
- March 2014
- July 2014

A total of four HVE “waves” will be undertaken. Each wave begins following a press event. The wave consists of several components:

- pre-surveys for attitude and awareness,
- observational surveys pre and post wave to measure behavioral change,
- various forms of media coverage and a
- seven day campaign by law enforcement over four to eight hour shifts
- as well as additional enforcement by participating agencies.

It is anticipated that a final report to NHTSA with a presentation of findings on the pilot project will be submitted by October 2014 after the fourth wave and compilation of data is completed.

## **Pilot Area**

Based on requirements in NHTSA’s request for application, and having already conducted one successful distracted driving pilot project in the Hartford area in 2009, the CT DOT HSO is partnering with law enforcement in the city of Danbury and surrounding towns to attempt to test whether texting enforcement can be successful over a diverse area made up of urban and rural municipalities. As such, in addition to Danbury, the Texting Enforcement Ban Demonstration Project boundaries will include the nearby municipalities of Bethel, Brookfield, Monroe, Newtown, Redding and Ridgefield.

## **Activities and Partners**

The following major tasks will be undertaken with the Texting Enforcement Ban Demonstration Project:

- developing best practice texting enforcement protocols/guidelines for law enforcement agencies;
- conducting four HVE periods where participating law enforcement agencies specifically target motorists who text while driving;
- implementing an aggressive earned media campaign to increase awareness of enforcement efforts and the perception of risk for receiving a texting citation and educating motorists of the dangers of this behavior; and
- analyzing project activity with the assistance of NHTSA data contractor to measure changes in motorist behavior as it relates to the project.

## **Expert Panel**

At the onset of the pilot project, the CT DOT HSO will coordinate the gathering of a Law Enforcement Expert Panel. This meeting will assemble participating partners including representatives of NHTSA's data analysis contractor, law enforcement agencies, the Chief State's Attorney's office in the form of the Transportation Safety Resource Prosecutor, CT DMV traffic unit, the CT DOT HSO Law Enforcement Liaison, area television news media as well as shift supervisors and representatives from law enforcement agencies that participated in the first distracted driving HVE campaign.

This panel will develop definitions of texting and enforcement protocols and guidelines, as well as oversee the development and implementation of training curriculums. The products of this panel will be transcribed into quick reference guides for officers participating in the HVE project.

## **Participating Law Enforcement Agencies**

Specifically, the following law enforcement agencies will be participating:

- Connecticut State Police
- Danbury Police Department
- Monroe Police Department

Additionally, as a Regional Traffic Unit (RTU), the following agencies will provide support to this project:

- Ridgefield Police Department
- Redding Police Department
- Brookfield Police Department
- Bethel Police Department
- Newtown Police Department\*

\*Enforcement will not take place in Newtown during the first enforcement period but Newtown Police will participate in enforcement based on availability.

These agencies will each contribute one officer and the town hosting the enforcement will contribute a supervisor to carry out HVE in one or more locations/towns each day of deployment. Connecticut State Police will participate in cooperation with municipal law enforcement on interstates and “on-off” ramps.

## Key Partners

NHTSA’s request for application for the texting ban strongly encouraged applicants to supplement the grant award with state or local funds. The CT DOT HSO has allocated \$50,000 in federal highway safety funds to pay for enforcement activity in addition to the grant award and has also required participating law enforcement agencies to contribute a 25% program match.

Other partners who have pledged to support this effort include the CT DMV, the Chief States Attorney’s Office, local media outlets, medical professionals in the pilot area as well as various corporate partners through standing relationships with area law enforcement. The State enjoys the advantage of having a robust group of traffic safety partners. Key partners for this demonstration project include:

- **State and municipal police** – providing law enforcement
- **Governor’s Office** – supporter and partner, including with various safe driving task forces
- **Chief State’s Attorney’s Office** – participant in media events and acts as an extension of the Division of Criminal Justice to assist with obtaining citation data related to HVE campaigns
- **CT Department of Motor Vehicles** – multiple support activities, including sites for pre/post surveying driver attitudes, outreach to private partners, and commercial vehicle enforcement
- **Police Training Academy** – training of municipal police
- **Yale University Hospital and Physician’s Offices** – host to media events and partners in distributing literature
- **Media Outlets** – News Channel 8 and News Channel 3 – assistance with maximizing media coverage and promoting anti-texting campaigns
- **Sports Venues** – potential partners in texting while driving messaging with event signage and promotion
- **Connecticut Association of Schools Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CASCIAC)** – sponsoring a program to local high school students about the dangers of drinking and driving and texting while driving through the use of interactive simulators
- **Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)** – supporters of enforcement efforts and related laws, including allowing use of Variable Message Boards (VMB’s) on State highways during HVE campaigns



## Data Collection and Analysis

The CT DOT HSO plans to work closely with NHTSA and their evaluation contractor to provide enforcement, awareness and attitude, media coverage and crash data.

- **Enforcement Data** – Enforcement data in the form of schedules, time sheets and manpower summaries will be collected.
- **Citation Data** – Citation data, specific to wave activity will be obtained through a cooperative partnership with Connecticut’s Judicial branch, specifically through the Central Infractions Bureau (CIB) to further evidence enforcement levels obtained during each HVE period.
- **Law Enforcement Agencies Experience Surveys** – Additionally, the CT DOT HSO will perform surveys of law enforcement agencies after each campaign wave to learn about their experiences. Surveys will attempt to determine what operational tactics were most effective, least effective, whether enforcement time periods were adequate, the level of earned media garnered through enforcement and any suggestions for operational improvement.
- **Driver Attitude and Awareness Surveys** – Attitude and awareness data will be obtained through a cooperative partnership with the CT DMV and by working closely with the NHTSA Evaluation contractor to add questions related to texting while driving to CT DMV survey information and make this data readily available for analysis. The purpose is to measure pre and post wave sentiments of Connecticut’s drivers to determine the level of impact of the HVE campaign.
- **Media Coverage** – Earned media (marketing coverage not paid for or distributed via owned networks) levels will be analyzed at the end of each wave by monitoring media coverage generated by HVE efforts from various sources including: kickoff press events, ride-alongs by news media with law enforcement, media releases and advisories from the CT DOT HSO, law enforcement and other traffic safety partners.

Upon completion of the pilot project, this article will be updated with a summary of findings from the final report to NHTSA.

## Other Notes and Resources

The information in this article is provided as a first step in understanding the transportation planning, development, design and implementation process. Many topics focus on elements particularly relevant to locally administered transportation projects. The full detail of the process, particularly rules of eligibility, special provisions, requirements, or constraints is not within the purview of this reference document. It is imperative that municipal staff contact their RPO early in the process for guidance.

In addition to the CT DOT website at [www.ct.gov/dot](http://www.ct.gov/dot), the Local Project Administration website of the University of Connecticut’s CTI-Technology Transfer Center provides many resources for municipal staff and managers of local projects: [www.t2center.uconn.edu](http://www.t2center.uconn.edu). Other articles in the Reference Series: Transportation in Connecticut are posted at the Department’s website and can be located by navigating to Publications > Pamphlets.

Article No. 10, entitled “Performance Measurement and Asset Inventory”, may also be of interest. This simple guide focuses on the Connecticut Department of Transportation’s (CT DOT) initiatives in this arena as well as its vision to move towards performance and asset management. The recent passage of a federal transportation bill and related requirements are also briefly presented.

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