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## Survey Reveals Public Open to Ban on Hand-Held Cell Phone Use and Texting

by Jenny Guarino

A study performed by the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) reveals that the public is open to a ban on hand-held cell phone use while driving. The study is based on data from 2009's Omnibus Household Survey (OHS), which is administered by BTS to a national sample of approximately 1,000 households. The OHS assesses the public's satisfaction with the U.S. transportation system. In October 2009, the survey examined public perceptions<sup>1</sup> of several activities related to distracted driving, including cell phone use (see table 1). Analysis of the study showed:

- 96 percent thought that text messaging using a cell phone, smart phone, or similar device should not be permitted while driving;
- 80 percent thought that drivers should not be allowed to talk on a hand-held cell phone while driving; and
- nearly three-quarters of the public (72 percent) thought that more controls on new cars should be mounted on the steering wheel.

Distractions behind the wheel (including texting and cell phone use) are a growing and serious concern on our Nation's roadways. Fatalities in distraction-affected crashes increased by 1.9 percent, from 3,267 in 2010 to 3,331 fatalities in 2011, as the number injured in distraction-affected crashes declined by 7 percent during that same time period, from 416,000 to 387,000 people.<sup>2</sup> The role of distracted driving in a crash is difficult to capture because data derive mainly from self reporting.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A four-point Likert response scale was used with the options of "strongly agree," "somewhat agree," "somewhat disagree" and "strongly disagree." Respondents were asked to pick the category that best fit their beliefs.

<sup>2</sup> National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, *2011 Motor Vehicle Crashes: Overview*, <http://www.nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/811701.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> "An Examination of Driver Distraction as Recorded in NHTSA Databases," NHTSA, September 2009 (Refer to: <http://www.distraction.gov/content/press-release/2011/12-8.html>)

In an effort to gauge public opinion on distracted driving, BTS introduced six distracted driving behavior items in the 2009 OHS. The results of the OHS found that more than 19 out of 20 Americans are open to a ban on texting from a mobile device while driving, and 16 out of 20 Americans are open to a ban on hand-held phone use while driving. This broad opposition to texting and hand-held cell phone use while driving cuts across all age, income, and regional groups (see table 2). These findings are of particular interest given the growing, nationwide concern over cell phone use and distracted driving, as shown by the increasing number of laws banning cell phone use while driving. As of December 2012, 39 States, Guam, and the District of Columbia had active bans on text messaging while driving (figure 1). In comparison, only 10 States, the District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands prohibited drivers from using hand-held cell phones while driving.

A study from the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute (VTTI)<sup>6</sup> that examined driver distraction in commercial vehicle operations helps put the dangers of cell phone use while driving in perspective. This study showed:

- text messaging while driving creates a situation that makes it 23 times more likely an event will occur that compromises driver safety than would occur otherwise, and
- sending or receiving a text message takes the driver's eyes off the road for an average of 4.6 seconds—the equivalent of driving the length of a football field at 55 mph blind.

### Analysis of 2009 Distracted Driving Items

Table 1<sup>4</sup> outlines the six items used in the 2009 OHS to gauge public opinion on a variety of distractions drivers

<sup>4</sup> Labels in italics used inside table 1 will be used in all subsequent graphics/text to identify distracted driving items.



**Table 1: Percent of Respondents Who Disagreed With Each Distracted Driving Behavior—October 2009**

Distracted driving item:	Percent
• Drivers of motor vehicles should be allowed to text message on a cell phone, blackberry, or similar device while driving... ( <i>Texting</i> )	96.2
• Televisions and video monitors in cars should be allowed to be mounted in a way that they are visible to drivers of OTHER cars... ( <i>In-vehicle monitors</i> )	86.2
• Drivers of motor vehicles should be allowed to talk on a hand-held cell phone while driving... ( <i>Hand-held phone</i> )	80.0
• Drivers of motor vehicles should be allowed to eat while driving... ( <i>Eating</i> )	61.6
• Drivers of motor vehicles should be allowed to talk on a cell phone using a hands-free device while driving... ( <i>Hands-free device</i> )	38.9
• Controls on new cars should be mounted on the steering wheel so that drivers do not have to reach across to operate the radio or other audio player... ( <i>Mounted controls</i> )	27.8

**NOTE:** The data in this figure are based on combining survey responses of “somewhat disagree” and “strongly disagree” categories for each item shown. Labels in italics used inside table 1 will be used in all subsequent graphics/text to identify distracted driving items.

**SOURCE:** U.S. Department of Transportation, Research and Innovative Technology Administration, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Omnibus Household Survey, at [http://www.bts.gov/programs/omnibus\\_surveys/household\\_survey/](http://www.bts.gov/programs/omnibus_surveys/household_survey/)

may face while operating a motor vehicle. These items are ranked by the percent of respondents who thought the activity should *not be allowed* while driving.<sup>5</sup> The item that generated the highest level of agreement among survey respondents (with 96 percent stating that it should not be allowed) involved texting while driving. According to an August 2011 report published by NHTSA, text messaging while driving is associated with the highest level of distraction potential.<sup>6</sup>

Table 2 highlights the percent of respondents who disagree with each distracted driving behavior by age group. Generally, opposition to distracted driving behavior increases with age.

### Cell Phone Use While Driving

The 2009 OHS survey asked participants to answer questions<sup>2</sup> on cell phone use while driving under three specific conditions:

1. texting while driving,
2. talking on a hand-held phone, or
3. talking on a hands-free device.

Table 1 illustrates that the majority of survey respondents recognize the danger of cell phone use when behind the wheel. About 96 percent of respondents were opposed to drivers being allowed to text while operating a vehicle, 80 percent opposed use of a hand-held phone, and 39 percent found the use of a hands-free device unacceptable. Figure 2 examines the percent of respondents who disagree with cell phone usage while operating a motor vehicle, by age group. In the case of hands-free phone use, table 2 shows that opposition rose greatly as age increased (from 22.36 percent among 18-34 year olds to 65.23 percent for participants over age 65). When looking at texting while driving, regardless of age, all participants held strong opposition to this activity being allowed while driving, with only a 5 percent difference between the youngest and oldest age groups.

Figure 3 examines the percent of respondents who oppose cell phone use while driving by income groups. As seen, the trends of disagreement are very similar amongst each distracted driving behavior. Overall, greater opposition ex-

<sup>5</sup> “Percent disagree” combines both the “somewhat disagree” and “strongly disagree” categories to determine the overall percentage of respondents who disagree with each distracted driving item.

<sup>6</sup> “Distraction Effects of Manual Number and Text Entry While Driving”, NHTSA, August 2011 (Refer to: <http://distraction.gov/download/research-pdf/811510v508.pdf>)

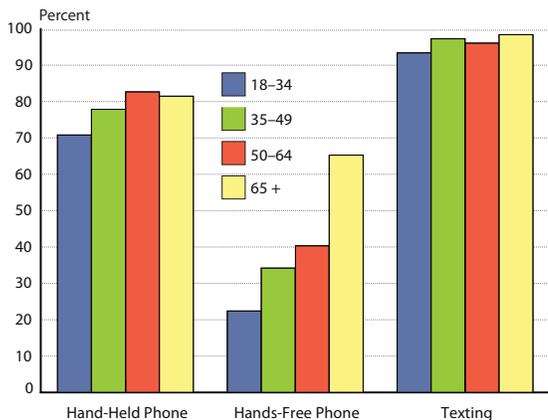
**Table 2: Percent of Respondents Disagreeing With Distracted Driving Behavior, by Age – October 2009**

	Hand-Held Phone	Hands-Free Phone	Texting	Eating	Mounted Controls	In-Vehicle Monitors
18-34	70.81	22.36	93.36	52.55	13.64	74.92
35-49	77.88	34.15	97.22	55.38	31.45	88.91
50-64	82.67	40.29	96.06	61.69	33.39	92.37
65+	81.42	65.23	98.37	81.28	31.87	88.10

**NOTE:** The percentages in this table are based on combining both the “somewhat disagree” and “strongly disagree” categories to determine the overall percentage of respondents who disagree with each distracted driving item.

**SOURCE:** U.S. Department of Transportation, Research and Innovative Technology Administration, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Omnibus Household Survey, at [http://www.bts.gov/programs/omnibus\\_surveys/household\\_survey/](http://www.bts.gov/programs/omnibus_surveys/household_survey/)

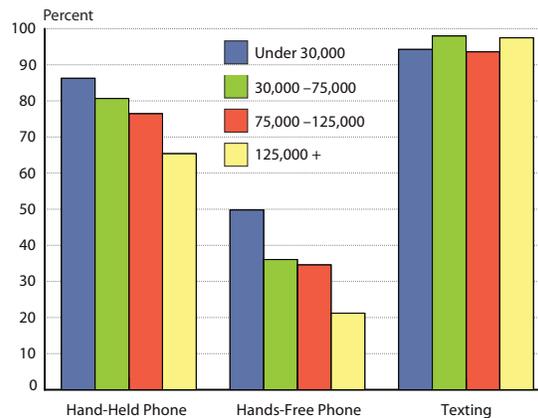
**Figure 2: Percent of Respondents Who Disagree With Cell Phone Use While Driving – by Age, October 2009**



**NOTE:** The data in this figure combine the “somewhat disagree” and “strongly disagree” categories to determine the overall percentage of respondents who disagree with each distracted driving item.

**SOURCE:** U.S. Department of Transportation, Research and Innovative Technology Administration, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Omnibus Household Survey, at [http://www.bts.gov/programs/omnibus\\_surveys/household\\_survey/](http://www.bts.gov/programs/omnibus_surveys/household_survey/)

**Figure 3: Percent of Respondents Who Disagree With Cell Phone Use While Driving – by Income, October 2009**



**NOTE:** The data in this figure combine the “somewhat disagree” and “strongly disagree” categories to determine the overall percentage of respondents who disagree with each distracted driving item.

**SOURCE:** U.S. Department of Transportation, Research and Innovative Technology Administration, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Omnibus Household Survey, at [http://www.bts.gov/programs/omnibus\\_surveys/household\\_survey/](http://www.bts.gov/programs/omnibus_surveys/household_survey/)

ists in the lower income groups, and opposition decreases as income levels rise. Opinions on texting while driving is consistent across income groups, with less than a 5 percent difference between the income group reporting the least opposition (\$75,000 – \$125,000; 93.57 percent) and the group reporting the highest level of disagreement (\$30,000 – \$75,000; 97.97 percent).

While the survey found that the majority of participants were against texting while driving, a 2011 NHTSA study showed that the percentage of drivers (during daylight hours) who were texting while driving increased significantly from 0.6 percent in 2009 to 0.9 percent in 2010. During the same time period, driver hand-held cell phone use remained unchanged at 5 percent.<sup>7</sup> This percent translates into 660,000 vehicles being driven by people using hand-held cell phones at a typical daylight moment. A 2012 study by Bridgestone found that one-third of surveyed individuals (2,000 young drivers age 15-21) read text messages while driving. A quarter of these individuals did not believe that talking on the phone while driving is dangerous.<sup>8</sup>

**Eating While Driving**

While the dangers of eating while driving are not as publicized as those of cell phone use, in 2010 eating behind the wheel contributed to 2.4 percent of fatal crashes involving

a distraction.<sup>9</sup> In the 2009 OHS, more than three out of five respondents (61.6 percent) reported that they did not think drivers should be allowed to eat while driving (see table 1).

Figure 4 compares the percent of respondents who strongly or somewhat disagree with allowing eating while driving by income and age group. Opposition to eating while driving was greatest among income groups earning less than \$30,000 per year, at 74 percent. As seen in figure 4, opposition decreased as the income level increased. With regards to age, opposition increases with the age of the respondent. Respondents’ disapproval to eating while driving increases by nearly 11 percent between the youngest and eldest age groupings.

**Mounted Controls**

As shown in table 1, 72 percent agreed that “controls on new cars should be mounted on the steering wheel so that drivers do not have to reach across to operate the radio or other audio player.” Only 14 percent of persons aged 18–34 opposed the presence of mounted controls on the steering wheel, compared to 32 percent (on average) of individuals aged 35 and older. In February 2012, NHTSA proposed guidelines recommending that all vehicle device functions be operable by the driver using, at most, one of the driver’s hands in order to be considered suitable for performance while driving.<sup>10</sup>

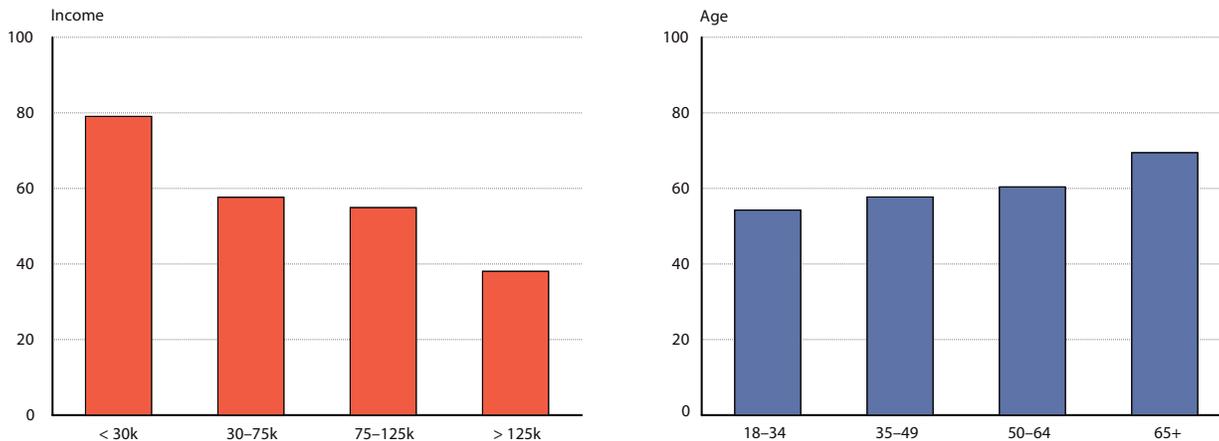
<sup>7</sup> “Driver Electronic Device Use in 2010”, NHTSA, December 2011 (Refer to: [http://distraction.gov/download/research-pdf/8052\\_TSF\\_RN\\_DriverElectronicDeviceUse\\_1206111\\_v4\\_tag.pdf](http://distraction.gov/download/research-pdf/8052_TSF_RN_DriverElectronicDeviceUse_1206111_v4_tag.pdf))

<sup>8</sup> “No Accidents? No Tickets? No Problem! Nationwide Survey Finds Teens in Denial About Safety on the Road” Bridgestone News Release, April 24, 2012 (Refer to: <http://www.teensdrivesmart.com/assets/downloads/SurveyRelease.pdf>)

<sup>9</sup> National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Fatality Analysis Reporting System, <http://www.nhtsa.gov/FARS>.

<sup>10</sup> “Visual-Manual NHTSA Driver Distraction Guidelines for In-Vehicle Electronic Devices”, NHTSA, February 24, 2012( Refer to: <https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2012/02/24/2012-4017/visual-manual-nhtsa-driver-distraction-guidelines-for-in-vehicle-electronic-devices#h-43>)

**Figure 4: Percent of Respondents Who Disagree With Eating While Driving – by Income and Age, October 2009**



**NOTE:** The data in this figure combine the “somewhat disagree” and “strongly disagree” categories to determine the overall percentage of respondents who disagree with each distracted driving item.

**SOURCE:** U.S. Department of Transportation, Research and Innovative Technology Administration, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Omnibus Household Survey, at [http://www.bts.gov/programs/omnibus\\_surveys/household\\_survey/](http://www.bts.gov/programs/omnibus_surveys/household_survey/)

## In-Vehicle Monitors

Approximately 86 percent of respondents thought that in-vehicle monitors (e.g., television and video monitors) should not be mounted so that they were visible to other drivers (see table 1). As age increases, persons are more likely to think that in-vehicle monitors distract other drivers. Persons aged 50–64 were most likely to concur (92 percent) with 85 percent of those individuals strongly disagreeing that visible monitors should be allowed (see table 2).

The analysis presented in this report examined public perception on select distracted driving behavior as defined in the 2009 OHS. Future research is needed to examine the relationship between public perception of the risks and driv-

er behavior. While this report shows that the majority of the public thought that driving while using a cell phone should not be allowed, it is a common activity while driving<sup>11</sup> and a potential precursor to fatal crashes. NHTSA estimates that 16 percent of all fatal and 20 percent of all injury crashes in 2009 involved driver distraction. Of the fatal crashes that involved driver distraction, 995 (18 percent) involved reports of a cell phone as a distraction.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> According to M. Madden and L. Rainie (2010), 61 percent of adults have talked on a cell phone while driving and 44 percent of all adults say they have been in a car when the driver used a cell phone in a way that put themselves or others in danger. See <http://distraction.gov/research/PDF-Files/Adults-Cellphone-Distractions.pdf> for more information.

<sup>12</sup> “Distracted Driving 2009”, NHTSA Traffic Safety Facts, 2010 (Refer to: <http://www.distraction.gov/research/PDF-Files/Distracted-Driving-2009.pdf>)

## About This Report

This report was prepared by Jenny Guarino, a Mathematical Statistician in the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS). BTS is a component of the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Research and Innovative Technology Administration (RITA). Special thanks to Pheny Weidman, Ph.D., a former Survey Statistician at BTS for her rigorous reviews and assistance on this report and to Dominic Menegus, a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Analyst in BTS, for his assistance creating the map.

This special report presents some of the key findings from the BTS Omnibus Household Survey (OHS) conducted in October 2009. The OHS is conducted annually to obtain information on how American’s use and view the transportation system in this country. In 2009 questions related to livability characteristics and distracted driving were introduced to the survey.

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## Data

This special report is based on the October 2009 Omnibus Household Survey results:

- [http://www.bts.gov/programs/omnibus\\_surveys/household\\_survey/](http://www.bts.gov/programs/omnibus_surveys/household_survey/)

## Publications

- *Public Perceptions on Characteristics of Livable Communities: The 2009 Omnibus Household Survey*, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, May 2011
- *OmniStats* — November 2001 - October 2005.
- *Making Connections: Intermodal Links Available at 70 Percent of all Stations Served by Commuter Rail, 2010*, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, January 2010
- *Making Connections: Intermodal Links Between Scheduled Passenger Ferries and Other Public Transportation Modes*, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, February 2009
- *Making Connections: Intermodal Links in the Public Transportation System*, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, September 2007.