

Huntsville's Ban on Texting While Driving Could Pass Tonight

On behalf of Johnston, Moore & Thompson

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Mayor Tommy Battle's proposed ban on texting while driving in Huntsville is up for a vote at tonight's City Council meeting, and it appears that it has the votes necessary to pass. Battle, an outspoken advocate for limits on multi-tasking behind the wheel, has pointed out that texting drivers are 23 times more likely to get into [car accidents](#) than drivers who are not distracted.

The new ordinance would ban not just the sending of text messages, but would also make it illegal for drivers in Huntsville to "send, receive, download or view" text messages, e-mails, digital photos, videos or even music. The ban does not prohibit cell phone use while driving.

Battle has already used his authority as mayor to fight distracted driving among city employees. He has ordered City of Huntsville employers to refrain from using any wireless communication devices while driving. He also hired a personal driver so he could safely use his Blackberry while he's on the road.

Texting Ban a 'Common Sense' Way to Reduce Car Accidents

Mayor Battle argues that it's "common sense" for people to refrain from "actively manipulating" cell phones, GPS units or other wireless devices while driving, and that is what the ordinance would prohibit. For example, Battle explained, you could listen to directions from your GPS navigation system, but you would not be allowed to program in a new destination unless you pulled over.

Huntsville's ban would apply to devices such as cell phones, laptop or tablet computers, electronic book readers, netbooks and satellite navigation systems. It would not affect car radios.

Violating the ban would be enforced as a secondary traffic violation, meaning that drivers could not be pulled over merely for violating the ban but could be issued a citation in combination with another traffic stop.

For a first offense, the driver would receive a \$100 fine. Repeat offenses would result in fines escalating to \$500, plus the possibility of up to three months in jail.

Enforcement would begin 60 days after the City Council passes the ban. If it is passed tonight, enforcement would begin September 8th or 9th.

Opposition to the Texting Ban Mostly Procedural

According to the Huntsville Times, four of the five members of the City Council support a crackdown on distracted driving, while the other could not be reached for comment.

Councilman Bill Kling's main concern is that the ordinance would not be enforced aggressively," he told the Times. Councilman Will Culver would prefer a statewide ban but says he plans to vote yes.

The risk of car accidents associated with texting while driving doesn't end at the Huntsville city limits, of course. "But at least we can go ahead and protect our constituency locally," he said.

If the ban passes, Huntsville will become the fourth city in Alabama to ban texting while driving by local ordinance, joining Jacksonville, Vestavia Hills and Roanoke. Madison and Birmingham are also considering bans.

Related Resource:

["Texting while driving ban could get green light at tonight's Huntsville City Council meeting"](#) (The Huntsville Times, July 8, 2010)