

**Testimony of  
Chairman Julius Genachowski  
Federal Communications Commission**

**Before the  
Subcommittees on Communications, Technology and the Internet and  
Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
U.S. House of Representatives**

**Joint Hearing on  
Driven To Distraction: Technological Devices and Vehicle Safety  
November 4, 2009**

I would like to thank Chairmen Boucher and Rush, Ranking Members Stearns and Radanovich, and other distinguished Members of the Subcommittees for the opportunity to testify on the important topic of distracted driving. I want to commend Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood for his excellent statement and his leadership on this issue.

This hearing has been called to explore a pressing concern: the increasing level of distracted driving relating to the use of communications devices, and the safety risks posed by that use. In this statement, I will briefly discuss some of the context for this problem, and then describe some actions that the Federal Communications Commission is pursuing to be a constructive part of the solution.

First, context. Communications technologies, particularly mobile wireless devices and networks, are a major contributor to job creation and the economy. According to CTIA, wireless capital expenditures from 1998-2008 totaled more than \$200 billion. In addition to promoting economic growth, these technologies connect us every day to family, friends and colleagues and are powerful tools for addressing many of the major challenges facing the nation. Mobile communications can save lives, improving emergency response by – for example – providing stranded motorists with immediate means to reach help, and by giving ambulance services, public safety answering points, and other first responders instant access to 21<sup>st</sup> century communications networks.

Mobile communications can also help promote better health care – for example – by enabling remote diagnosis and monitoring, or providing better care at lower cost for patients with diabetes, heart disease, and other illnesses. And mobile communications can play a role in improving education and fostering a clean energy future. Further, mobile broadband will contribute significantly to our nation's overall broadband strategy, which, as Congress has directed, must seek to provide all Americans with high-speed Internet access.

Growth in wireless devices has been astronomic. In 1995, only 34 million people subscribed to mobile phone service. By the summer of 2009, there were 276 million subscribers. Today, the vast majority of teenagers – four out of five – now have mobile phones, as parents well know.

The popularity of mobile devices, however, has had some unintended and even dangerous consequences. We now know that mobile communications is leading to a significant increase in distracted driving, resulting in injury and loss of life. According to AAA, nearly 50% of teens admit to texting while driving. I learned last week that 11 percent of all drivers on the road are holding an electronic device. That amounts to 812,000 distracted drivers at any given moment. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reported in 2008 that driver distraction is the cause of 16% of all fatal crashes – 5,800 people killed – and 21% of crashes resulting in an injury – 515,000 people wounded. Distracted driving endangers life and property and the current levels of injury and loss are unacceptable. There's no way around it – this is an urgent problem that simply must be addressed.

I do not believe there is a single solution to this challenge. The responsibility lies with all of us – individuals, companies in the wireless space, as well as government. Everyone involved can and should take appropriate action, with the goal of dramatically reducing and ultimately eliminating the risk of distracted driving due to the use of communications devices. Individuals should take personal responsibility. Adults should drive responsibly, and families and friends should help each other drive responsibly. Drivers of all ages – not just teenagers – must refrain from texting while driving. We should develop a cultural norm that driving while texting is totally unacceptable.

The wireless industry has made some strong first efforts to raise public awareness. The industry trade association, CTIA, in coordination with the National Safety Council, announced a joint “On the Road, Off the Phone” campaign that is focused on educating teen drivers on the dangers of distracted driving. Together they have devised a website for parents and teens that includes suggested ground rules for teen drivers, and have rolled out a public service announcement warning of the dangers of texting while driving. I also acknowledge that some carriers have taken independent action to alert their customers not to text and drive.

We also recognize the central role of the States in this area. According to the Governor's Highway Safety Association, 18 States as well as the District of Columbia have made it illegal to text while driving. Moreover, the National Traffic Safety Board has identified prohibiting the use of interactive mobile devices by young novice drivers as one of its top “wish list” items for rulemaking at the state level.

On the Federal level, I applaud Secretary LaHood and the Department of Transportation for leading an impressive, coordinated effort to increase public awareness of the dangers of distracted driving. In addition, the National Traffic Safety Administration has encouraged the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration – the agency tasked with reducing crashes of large trucks and buses – to prohibit mobile use by commercial drivers of school buses and motor coaches, except in emergencies. Also at the Federal level, as you are aware, the President recently issued an Executive Order that prohibits Federal workers from texting while driving on the job or when using government vehicles. With respect to FCC staff, I have urged our employees to set an example by forbearing from texting and driving at any time, and to ask their families and friends to do the same.

Putting the brakes on the distracted driving epidemic will require both dedication and creative thinking, and the FCC is committed to doing its part to address this growing crisis. I believe we can play an important and constructive role in three critical areas.

First, we can identify and seek to facilitate the development of innovative technologies that could prevent or reduce the risk of distracted driving. New ideas, advances in technology, and entrepreneurial thinking can create solutions that are sustainable, consumer-friendly, and non-intrusive. We are already witnessing new technologies that could be harnessed to generate an immediate impact. We should explore a full range of technologies that can reduce or eliminate driver distractions. For example, some smartphones and other technologies allow users to control their mobile phones and vehicle systems using their voices. These technologies might be used by drivers to avoid the dangerous distraction of looking at device screens. There may also be opportunities to use RFID-sensor technology in keychains that would disable selected functions on a driver's mobile device activated by the start up of their car. In addition, there is what some call "haptic" technology, which simulates a sense of touch, creating the impression of buttons or controls even on flat surfaces. Could haptics be used to give drivers more control over their cars and electronic devices while keeping their eyes on the road? Could existing voice-to-text technologies be used to improve safety? These questions are worth exploring. And to help answer these questions, the FCC will undertake a new initiative to identify and assess technologies that can reduce distracted driving.

Second, we can bring together industry groups, consumers, and other stakeholders to coordinate a much broader response to the challenges of distracted driving. We hope to work with handset manufacturers, wireless providers, and the mobile app developer community, to encourage voluntary solutions that could change consumer behavior. The Commission stands ready to play a role in initiating and facilitating many of these types of discussions. I note the success of the DOT distracted driving summit. We hope to build on DOT's experience and excellent work.

Third, the FCC will pursue consumer outreach and education. We at the Commission can bring to bear our recent experience with the digital television transition, as well as on broadband, to increase public awareness of the dangers of distracted driving. The FCC's Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau has already issued a Consumer Advisory and launched a website to serve as a clearinghouse and launching point for information on distracted driving. This group is working with our New Media team to use new social networking tools to spread awareness to a much larger – and younger – audience than we ever could before, including the 100,000 people who follow us daily on Twitter. To help inform and guide our efforts in each of these areas, the FCC will be holding a distracted driving workshop in the next few weeks. This will bring together some of the best minds, ideas, and approaches for addressing this critical issue, and we hope it will help all stakeholders identify and explore the most effective levers for addressing this crisis.

In closing, I look forward to continuing to work with the Committee, Secretary LaHood, consumer groups, auto safety advocates, and wireless industry participants and innovators on this important issue. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.