

ORANGE CONES. NO PHONES.

Distracted Driving on the Capital Beltway

When the Capital Beltway HOT Lanes open in late 2012, they will provide commuters with the option of a faster, more reliable trip. In the short-term, the 14-mile HOT Lanes corridor will be an active work zone – leaving no room for driver error.

Approximately 210,000 individuals drive on the Capital Beltway each day – and more than half do so while distracted by cell phones. According to a recent survey conducted by Transurban-Fluor and AAA Mid-Atlantic, 56 percent, or 117,600 Beltway drivers, use their cell phone to make calls or read/write text messages. These behaviors are frequent – one-third of all Beltway drivers admit to using their cell phones while driving “most times.”

Distracted Driving is Dangerous

Cell phone use is a factor in an estimated 342,000 auto accident injuries and costs \$43 billion each year in property damage, lost wages, medical bills and loss of life¹. According to the Transurban-Fluor and AAA Mid-Atlantic survey, along the Beltway:

- A driver using a cell phone is twice as likely to have had an incident or near miss than a driver not using a cell phone
- Texting is even more dangerous – drivers reading texts are nearly twice as likely to have had an incident or near miss than those using cell phones just for calling
- Additionally, drivers who are writing as well as reading texts are more than three times as likely to have had an incident or near miss than other drivers on the Capital Beltway

Drivers should change their behavior in construction work zones – a constricted, constantly changing environment – but don't. Nearly half of all Beltway drivers make no change to their cell phone behavior in the Beltway construction zone. Just 16 percent say they make a conscious effort not to read or write texts or e-mails in the construction zone.

Distracted Driving is Illegal

The Commonwealth of Virginia bans:

- Text messaging for all drivers
- Cell phone use for school bus drivers
- All cell phone use for drivers under 18 years of age²

However, many drivers on the Capital Beltway are not aware of laws pertaining to cell phone use:

- 17 percent of drivers think there are no Virginia laws pertaining to cell phones
- 37 percent do not know of any Virginia laws pertaining to cell phones

Drivers Know Better

Capital Beltway drivers are aware that cell phones and driving don't mix:

- 95 percent of Beltway drivers believe that reading a text while driving qualifies as distracted driving
- 99 percent of drivers believe that reading or writing a text presents a threat to other drivers

However, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety found that 67 percent of drivers said they had recently talked on the phone while driving and 21 percent had recently texted.

Age Matters

Distracted drivers are disproportionately young.

	Younger (18-24)	Older (45-54)
Read texts while driving	35 percent	10 percent
Write texts while driving	24 percent	5 percent

Changing Habits

Awareness of the dangers of distracted driving makes a difference. Seventy-four percent of people who can recall seeing or hearing a story on distracted driving have changed their cell phone behavior in the Beltway construction zone. Just 26 percent of people that cannot recall seeing or hearing a story on distracted driving have changed their behavior.

Work Zone Safety Tips³

- Stay alert – Expect anything to occur when entering a work zone
- Pay close attention – Signs and work zone flaggers save lives
- Turn on your headlights – Workers and other motorists must see you
- Don't tailgate – Unexpected stops frequently occur in work zones
- Don't speed – Note the speed limits in and around the work zone
- Keep up with traffic flow – Dedicate your full attention to the road and those traveling around you
- Don't change lanes in the work zone – The time saved just isn't worth it
- Minimize distractions – Avoid changing radio stations and using cell phones
- Expect the unexpected – Keep an eye out for workers and their equipment
- Be patient – Remember, the work zone crew members are working to improve your future ride

Project Overview

The Capital Beltway HOT Lanes will provide new travel choices for a faster and more reliable trip. Project benefits include:

- Two new lanes in each direction on the Capital Beltway from the Springfield Interchange to just north of the Dulles Toll Road (14 miles)
- First-time introduction of HOV and reliable transit options on the Capital Beltway and in Tysons Corner
- Replacement of more than \$268 million of aging infrastructure, including more than 58 bridges and overpasses
- Improved and expanded sound wall protection for local neighborhoods
- Upgrades to 12 key interchanges and new HOT Lanes access points at Merrifield and Tysons Corner

More Information

For more information on the Capital Beltway HOT Lanes, visit www.virginiahotlanes.com.

¹ The Washington Post, "Tighter Cellphone Laws Might Face Static," <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/08/12/AR2009081203235.html>
² Governors Highway Safety Association, http://www.ghsa.org/html/stateinfo/laws/cellphone_laws.html
³ Virginia Department of Transportation, <http://virginiadot.org/programs/prog-wzsa-tips.asp>

