

Advocates Hope Letters to Obama Will Put Rear-View Cameras in All Cars

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2013 Ford Mustang Picture

NHTSA proposed mandatory rear-view cameras to prevent "backover" accidents in 2010, but a final rule has been delayed. | February 13, 2013 | *Ford Motor Company*

Just the Facts:

NHTSA proposed mandatory rear-view cameras to prevent "backover" accidents in 2010, but a final rule has been delayed.

The rule would add \$159 to \$203 to the price of each vehicle, which is up to \$2.7

billion annually for the fleet.

Advocates contend the cost is a small price to pay for saving lives.

BALA CYNWYD, Pennsylvania — A regulation that would require vehicles to have rear-view cameras to minimize the chances of a driver running over pedestrians — particularly small children — has had its implementation delayed three times, most recently on December 31, 2012. Now an organization that sponsored the law is hoping that an emotion-laden letter campaign to President Obama might be the push the measure needs.

The proposed rule is "stuck" in cost-benefit analysis at the federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB), says Janette Fennell, founder and president of Kids and Cars. "And we need to get it unstuck."

"It appears that OMB thinks the rule is too expensive," Fennell wrote in a letter to rally the rule's supporters. "Yet everyone knows the life of a young child is priceless. Personally, I think it's a heck of a deal to simply add a rear-view camera system."

The [Cameron Gulbransen Kids Transportation Safety Act](#), named after a child who died when his father accidentally backed over him, was signed into law in 2008. In 2010, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) proposed expanding the required rear field of view for the passenger fleet, buses and low-speed vehicles by adding rear-mounted video cameras and in-vehicle displays.

NHTSA estimates that 221 people die annually in "backover" accidents, and 14,000 are injured. It says that the rule would cut those deaths and injuries roughly in half.

During the rule's development, automakers expressed concerns about the cost of the equipment, which NHTSA estimated would add \$159 to \$203 to the price of a car. Some also questioned whether the entire fleet needed the cameras, or just larger vehicles with more restricted visibility. NHTSA's proposed rule called for automakers to have cameras in 10 percent of cars by September 2012, 40 percent by September 2013 and 100 percent by September 2014.

According to Edmunds.com data, 45 percent of 2012 model year vehicles offer exterior cameras, including some compacts, such as the Kia Rio and 2012 Honda Insight. The cameras, however, are not standard on all trim levels. Although cameras already are increasingly finding their way into a variety of cars, it is the rule's overall financial impact on consumers and the car industry that appears to have stalled it.

Federal agencies are requirement to complete cost-benefit analyses of their rules if they are expected to cost more than \$100 million. This rule is in the range of \$1.9 billion to \$2.7 billion annually, NHTSA estimates. Based on those costs, the back-up camera regulation is "among the most expensive rules under consideration," according to an article about the rule by the Center for Effective Government.

The OMB's Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs reviews those agency cost-benefit estimates. And if "the estimated benefits of a public protection exceed the estimated aggregate costs (to industry and consumers) of complying with the rule," an agency can't adopt it, according to Center for Effective Government.

In statistical terms, NHTSA put the value of each life saved at \$6.1 million. That's not the actual value of a life — and certainly not the figure a parent would put on a child's life — "but the estimate of what economists think people would pay to avoid a small risk of death," the center wrote. In any event, the value of lives saved by the rule doesn't outweigh the cost of the regulation.

But according to the center's article on the rule, the federal order that governs those cost-benefit analyses specifically says that agencies "should consider quantified benefits, as well as benefits that cannot be quantified, when deciding whether to regulate."

Kids and Cars asked the rule's supporters to send letters to the president because he reads 10 each day from average people in order to stay in touch with what matters to them, Fennell says.

"We need your help to make sure President Obama knows how incredibly urgent it is to issue the rear visibility rule," she wrote to supporters.

Fennell said that to date, "hundreds and hundreds" of letters have been sent to the White House, and more are still on their way.

One letter came from Patrick Ivison, 18, a freshman at the University of Southern California, who was run over as a toddler by a driver who did not see him. Ivison suffered a severe spinal cord injury and uses a wheelchair.

"Please make sure that not another family has to suffer the loss of a precious child or that children who are meant to run and play do not have to rely on a wheelchair and those around them to move on," Ivison wrote.

NHTSA declined to say when the rule might be finalized. "The Department remains committed to improving rearview visibility for the nation's fleet and will issue a final rule upon completion of the regulatory review process," an agency spokesman wrote in an e-mail. OMB did not reply to an Edmunds.com e-mail seeking comment.

For his part, Ivison is trying to make sure that he's a driver with full vision. It took some physical training for him to be able to drive, but he got his license when he was 16. He bought a van with more than 200,000 miles on it, and modified it so he could drive. In his letter to the president, he wrote: "One of the first modifications I made was to purchase a \$60 back up camera so that I can see when I back up."

Edmunds says: Rear-view cameras are popular with car buyers and are becoming more and more common in the fleet, at lower price points. That should lessen the regulatory burden to carmakers and buyers. If regulators wait long enough, the rule might be moot.

<http://www.edmunds.com/car-news/advocates-hope-letters-to-obama-will-put-rear-view-cameras-in-all-cars.html>
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