

## Whatever happened to the backup camera mandate?

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Just a few months ago, it seemed to be a done deal that light vehicles sold in the United States would need backup cameras within a few years.

Auto safety regulators had proposed to mandate them in new vehicles by as soon as 2014, following through on a 2008 law aimed at reducing the number of children who are backed over and hurt or killed. Then, President Obama won re-election and lobbyists for car companies seemed to lose their best shot at blocking the rule.

The rule was widely expected to be released in December, as *Automotive News* reported at the time.

But now, more than three months after Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood promised to make the mandate final, it has not materialized. Safety advocates are incensed, and so are the bill's sponsors.

"It's inexcusable that we haven't done anything," said Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-Ill., one of the bill's two main sponsors, during a press conference on Capitol Hill.

So what happened?

They may not be shouting it from the rooftops, but safety advocates have their fingers pointed at the White House.

During a brief interview with *Automotive News*, Schakowsky said she has talked to President Obama about the topic. She said she asked him and his chief of staff, Denis McDonough, why the White House has not given the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration the all-clear to mandate backup cameras. They told her they were aware of the issue, but did not say what they intended to do, Schakowsky said.

Rep. Peter King, R-N.Y., the other main sponsor of the bill, said during an interview that he has gotten the impression the rule has been dropped because of costs, but "we haven't gotten a good explanation at all."

A camera adds \$58 to \$203 to the cost of a car or truck, depending on whether the vehicle already has a video display, according to a NHTSA study from 2010.

### **Automakers generally like it**

Though some automakers have lobbied for a reprieve from the mandate, they generally like the technology.

Ford Motor Co., for instance, makes backup cameras available on each of its vehicles, though the cameras are often included in a premium trim package aimed at customers willing to pay for more safety features.

And Honda Motor Co., which first used a backup camera in the 2003 Acura MDX, now installs the cameras as standard equipment in 96 percent of its nameplates. Next year, once the Honda Fit and the Acura ILX get cameras, that number will rise to 100 percent.

### **Useless regulation?**

Critics of the rules argue that a mandate could lock in a specific technology. They say there is no need for a new regulation when the number of vehicles with backup cameras is rapidly increasing every year anyway.

But safety advocates see it differently. Automotive cameras have gotten so cheap that the redesigned Honda Accord has six of them, said Joan Claybrook, the prominent auto safety advocate and former NHTSA administrator, during the press conference.

"If they're so damn cheap, why don't they issue this rule?" she said.

Without the Obama administration on its side, safety advocates can do little except ramp up the pressure on car companies.

During a recent press conference, a number of parents told the heart-wrenching stories of how their children were backed over and killed, and how a backup camera might have meant the difference.

Don't be surprised if you hear more of these stories on the news very soon.

You can reach **Gabe Nelson** at [gnelson@crain.com](mailto:gnelson@crain.com)

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