

May 22, 2023

The Honorable Ed Markey
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Josh Gottheimer
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Ted Cruz
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tom Kean Jr.
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 2051

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Rob Menendez
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Deb Fischer
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Bruce Westerman
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Marie Gluesenkamp Perez
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable J.D. Vance
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: AM for Every Vehicle Act

On behalf of the below organizations we write to you today in opposition to the proposed mandate for automakers to include broadcast AM radio in new vehicles. As new products come to market, the federal government must prioritize policies that promote innovation, consumer preferences, and freedom of choice. While there are many benefits to AM radio, there are several reasons why such a mandate is unnecessary and contrary to the principles of a free-market economy. While we acknowledge the important role AM radio has played over the last century as part of an emergency communications system layered across different media with multiple redundancies, the requirement would unnecessarily hinder progress in the automotive industry.

Access to Emergency Communications

Regarding access to emergency communications, emergency alerts are delivered through several overlapping mediums to provide maximum redundancy, and the FCC is working to continue improving the system to service a broader array of Americans during emergencies. Some make the argument that AM radio is necessary for emergency broadcasts, but in such cases FM radio, internet streaming services, better rural broadband, and text alerts supplement any loss of AM radio access.

Cell phones—owned by 97% of Americans today¹—receive Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEAs) based on their location. WEAs are unaffected by network congestion.² Americans can receive WEAs even if cellular networks can no longer support other methods of communication (calls, text, and emails). Similarly, WEAs are entirely free to receive, short (under 360 characters), and easily identified by a unique tone and vibration. Unlike radio alerts, they can also contain an embedded hyperlink to guide the recipient to helpful information within seconds of receiving the alert; given that 85% of Americans with a cell phone own a smartphone,³ the vast majority of people receiving an alert can take advantage of this benefit. Unlike WEAs, radio alerts require the listener to have turned the radio on and be tuned in to select channels participating in the Emergency Alert System. Another key aspect of WEAs is that they may be designed to provide support for Americans with hearing impairments in a way that traditional AM radio alerts are incapable of doing, as well as offering other accommodations for Americans with disabilities.⁴ Although participation in the WEA program is voluntary, all major cell phone providers participate, ensuring a high degree of reliability.⁵

In addition, “the Integrated Public Alert & Warning System (IPAWS) is FEMA's national system for local alerting that provides authenticated emergency and life-saving information to the public through mobile phones using Wireless Emergency Alerts, to radio and television via the Emergency Alert System, and on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Weather Radio.”⁶ In other words—emergency alerts are duplicated across several signals to ensure maximum coverage.

New digital and satellite radio systems are also designed to provide the same alerts to a larger audience and over a broader geographic area, and excluding AM radios from vehicles does not mean drivers will be prevented from hearing AM radio altogether. Today, most vehicles are equipped with digital radio as a standard feature,⁷ and this technology allows authorities to tune the radio to the appropriate channel.

Digital radios are also free-of-charge, more resistant to interference than AM reception, and better suited to mobile objects like vehicles. Similar to AM radio, digital radio is broadcast from a transmission site and does not require an internet or Wi-Fi connection. In fact, digital audio broadcasting (DAB) is commonly used in Europe for emergency warning systems. Norway has completely phased out the use of FM and AM radio in favor of DAB, which they say will improve their emergency preparedness system.

Conclusion

Mandating analog AM radio in automobiles—which Congress has never done—is an unnecessary action in the modern communication era and has no bearing on the ability of drivers to receive emergency alerts across multiple modes of communication currently available in automobiles manufactured today. Congress should allow auto manufacturers and consumers to choose designs that prioritize individual

¹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/>

² <https://www.ready.gov/alerts>

³ <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/>

⁴ <https://www.fcc.gov/fcc-consider-improving-accessibility-and-effectiveness-wireless-emergency-alerts-0>

⁵ <https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/practitioners/integrated-public-alert-warning-system/public/wireless-emergency-alerts>

⁶ <https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/practitioners/integrated-public-alert-warning-system#:~:text=The%20Emergency%20Alert%20System%20>

⁷ <https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/digital-radio#:~:text=In%20the%20United%20States%2C%20digital.FM%20on%20a%20digital%20radio>

choice and technological innovation rather than mandate a particular communications technology for information and content that is otherwise widely available to the public through multiple other modes of communication.

We thank you for your consideration.



Albert Gore
Executive Director
Zero Emission Transportation Association



Gary Shapiro
President and CEO
Consumer Technology Association



John Bozzella
CEO
Alliance for Automotive Innovation



Linda Moore
TechNet
President and CEO