



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on April 28, 2026

Federal In-car Monitoring Mandate Expands Data Collection and Control Powers

A federal mandate rooted in a 2021 bipartisan law is set to reshape every new car sold in the United States, and potentially the boundaries of personal mobility itself. By the 2027 model year, vehicles will be required to include systems that monitor drivers for impairment and can intervene if necessary. Supporters frame it as a safety breakthrough. Critics call it a “kill switch.”

The policy has broad political backing. It passed with support from both Democrats and Republicans and has remained intact across administrations, including under the recent Consolidated Appropriations Act, which preserved both funding and the mandate. In January, that support was tested when the House voted down an amendment that would have stripped funding for the requirement, effectively keeping the rule on track.

One of the most persistent critics is Representative Thomas Massie (R-Ky.), who [continues](#) to lead opposition alongside a small group of lawmakers. Massie warns that Congress is normalizing continuous monitoring inside privately owned vehicles, a shift he argues carries implications far beyond roadway safety.

The Law

The requirement comes from the [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#), specifically Section 24220. The law directs regulators to establish a safety standard for what it calls “advanced impaired driving prevention technology.”

The statute defines that technology as a system that can

- (i) passively monitor the performance of a driver of a motor vehicle to accurately identify whether that driver may be impaired; and
- (ii) prevent or limit motor vehicle operation if an impairment is detected;

It also allows for systems that can “passively and accurately detect whether the blood alcohol concentration of a driver ... is equal to or greater than” the legal limit, with authority to intervene. The law sets the objective, not the method.

It also cites research from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) estimating that such technology “can prevent more than 9,400 alcohol-impaired driving fatalities annually.”



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The mandate and its funding were reaffirmed in early 2026, when President Donald Trump signed the [Consolidated Appropriations Act](#), ensuring the requirement remains in force.

From Safety Feature to Standard Equipment

Driver monitoring is not new. It is already embedded in many modern vehicles, especially those equipped with advanced driver-assistance systems.

General Motors [says](#) its Super Cruise system “tracks the driver’s head position and/or the driver’s gaze” and alerts the driver when attention drifts. Chevrolet [describes](#) the system as using a camera mounted on the steering wheel to track “head and eye movement.”

Similarly, Ford’s BlueCruise [uses](#) “a driver-facing camera and infrared lighting” to confirm that the driver remains focused on the road. Subaru’s DriverFocus system uses comparable [technology](#), capable of alerting occupants if the driver appears drowsy or distracted.

Today, these systems primarily issue warnings. Under the federal rule, similar technology could become standard in every new vehicle. It would not simply prompt the driver. It could help determine whether the vehicle should start or continue operating.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) describes the current landscape in similar terms. Its 2026 [report](#) to Congress explains that indirect systems infer driver state “through camera-based monitoring and vehicle inputs.” It also notes that most current systems are designed to detect “drowsiness, inattention, and sudden sickness,” not alcohol impairment.

That distinction matters. A system designed to detect distraction is not automatically capable of reliably identifying intoxication. Yet the mandate moves in that direction, turning optional in-cabin monitoring into a required compliance system.

Safety Claims Outrun the Evidence

Lawmakers argue that driver-monitoring systems improve road safety. But the evidence does not yet support treating them as proven crash-prevention technology.

The strongest real-world results belong to other systems, including automatic emergency braking, lane-departure prevention, blind-spot detection, and rear crash-prevention features. For example, the IIHS has documented measurable crash reductions for those technologies.

By contrast, IIHS [describes](#) camera-based monitoring as “a promising recent development” that can detect when drivers look away from the road and issue alerts. That distinction is important. A system that warns a distracted driver may help. But it is not the same as a system proven to prevent crashes, detect intoxication, and safely determine whether a vehicle should operate.

The American Automobile Association (AAA) has [studied](#) driver monitoring in the context of partial automation. Its findings highlight a different concern. Drivers often overestimate what assisted driving systems can do. Monitoring may improve engagement, but that is a narrower claim than reliably identifying impairment.

Recent academic research reinforces that caution, [finding](#) “limited empirical evidence” that driver monitoring systems reduce visual distraction in real-world conditions.

Federal investigators share that skepticism. After fatal crashes involving Ford BlueCruise, the National Transportation Safety Board [warned](#) that “the drivers’ overreliance on the automated system contributed to both crashes.”



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The safety case is therefore split. The goal is clear and widely supported. Drunk, distracted, and drowsy driving kill thousands each year. But the technology has not yet proven it can address that problem without introducing new risks, false interventions, or a false sense of security. Critically, even small error rates could affect millions of drivers. A sober driver could be blocked. An impaired driver could be missed.

The Data and Control Problem

The mandate claims to solve one problem. It creates several others.

Firstly, the law requires continuous monitoring, but it does not clearly define what happens to the data. Driver-monitoring systems generate a constant stream of behavioral information. Every glance, blink, and lapse in attention can be recorded. Unlike traditional vehicle data, this is not about the car, it is about the driver.

In addition, this data does not exist in isolation. Modern vehicles already collect location data through GPS and connected systems. Driver monitoring adds behavioral signals on top. Together, they create a far more detailed and sensitive profile.

At the same time, the current framework does not clearly restrict how this data is stored, shared, or monetized. Automakers, insurers, and third parties all have incentives to use it. Once collected at scale, it becomes difficult to limit or contain.

Moreover, government access is a related concern. Federal agencies are already [purchasing location data](#) from private brokers. Adding behavioral data expands what can be known without direct collection. The “kill switch” law does not require this use, but it builds the infrastructure for it.

The Precedent and the Creep

The system begins with impaired driving, the strongest possible justification. Indeed, few policies carry broader public support than stopping drunk driving.

However, the infrastructure does not limit itself to that use.

Once vehicles are required to monitor drivers and can restrict operation, the principle is established: Mobility becomes conditional. The question is no longer whether a car can be stopped, or even redirected to another location such as a nearby police station, but under what conditions that authority should be exercised.

For example, public health emergencies could justify restrictions on movement, where quarantine zones could be enforced through vehicle software. Financial or legal compliance measures could be tied to vehicle operation. Insurance-based risk scoring could influence whether a vehicle is allowed to function under certain conditions. Even an [expanding](#) and [shifting](#) definition of “political extremism” could, in theory, be incorporated into such frameworks.

In other words, the concern is not a single policy shift. It is the direction of travel. Currently, the mandate is framed as a safety measure. In practice, it creates a foundation where control over movement can evolve over time, shaped not only by lawmakers, but by regulators, corporations, and future policy decisions.



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