Statement of Ted Leonard
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To The Joint Senate and House Transportation Committees Hearing
Tuesday, July 14, 2015

Thank you Chairmen and members of the Senate and House Transportation Committees for the opportunity to provide input on the issue of Distracted Driving.

The Pennsylvania AAA Federation is the state association of AAA clubs in Pennsylvania encompassing 3.2 member motorists. Since 1902 AAA has been a leader and advocate for the safety and security of all travelers.

Distracted Driving is a deadly behavior. Federal estimates suggest that distraction contributes to 16 percent of all fatal crashes, leading to around 5,000 deaths every year. Distracted driving consistently ranks as one of the top driver concerns that makes them feel less safe on the road. Distracted Driving is defined as "*the diversion of attention away from activities critical for safe driving toward a competing activity, which may result in insufficient or no attention to activities critical for safe driving.*" There are three main sources of driver distraction:

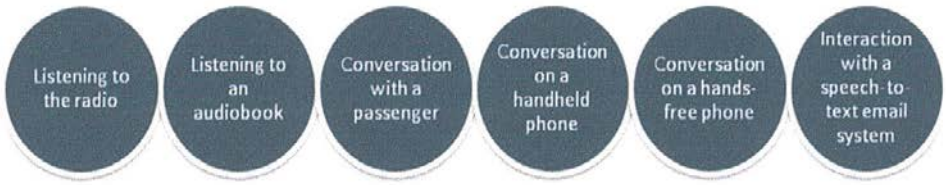
- **Visual** (eyes off the road)
- **Manual** (hands off the wheel)
- **Cognitive** (mind off the task)

Of these, *cognitive distraction* has been the most difficult to study. The prevailing assumption is that "hands-free" equals safe. While 66 percent of licensed drivers say driver use of hand-held cell phones is **unacceptable**, 56 percent say hands-free is **acceptable**. The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety began in 2011 to study cognitive distraction and to identify sources of cognitive distractions for drivers. The study, now in its third phase, is continuing however prior phases have identified several key findings:

- Even when a driver's eyes are on the road and hands on the wheel, sources of cognitive distraction cause significant impairments to driving such as:
    - Suppressed brain activity in the areas needed for safe driving;
    - Increased reaction time (to peripheral detection and vehicle braking);
    - Missed cures and decreased accuracy; and
    - Decreased visual scanning of the driving environment (tunnel vision, of sorts).
- Driver interactions with in-vehicle speech-to-text systems (such as infotainment offerings in many new vehicles) create the highest level of cognitive distraction among the tasks assessed.
- Hands-free does not equal Risk-free.

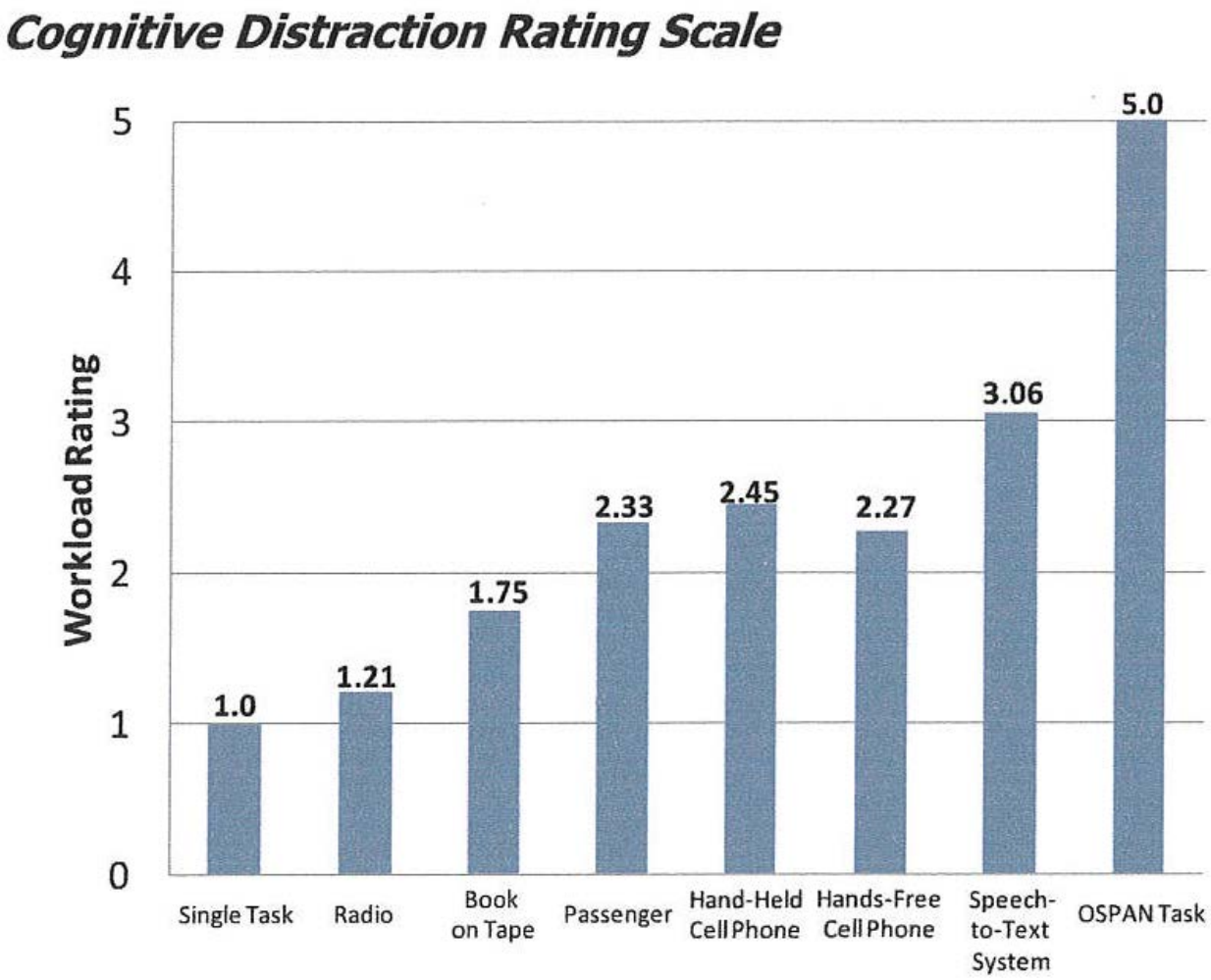
Studies were conducted using three methods in each experiment: Laboratory, Driving Simulator and Instrumented Vehicle.

Six common driver tasks were analyzed in each experiment



A seventh and eighth condition – non-distracted driving, and a complex series of math and verbal problems (OSPAN task) – were included to anchor the low and high ends of the rating scale, respectively.

Measurements from all experiments were standardized to create one rating scale



While research is ongoing, AAA supports a comprehensive approach to addressing distracted driving and believes any legislative or administrative proposal to address distracted driving

should be based on sound research and/or fundamental safety principles and include a significant education effort. AAA supports laws with enhanced penalties for drivers who cause crashes or otherwise commit traffic violations as a result of engaging in any distracted behavior while driving. AAA has also urged the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), safety researchers, electronics manufacturers, and the automobile industry to continue research identifying design characteristics and applications that will minimize driver distraction when using installed or portable electronic devices for navigation, communication, vehicle control or infotainment purposes.

Thank you for your interest in this critical highway safety issue and I would be happy to provide any additional information requested.