



DRAFT SUMMARY OF VEHICLE WEIGHT SAFETY STUDY TASK FORCE FINDINGS

DRAFT

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Background on Assembly Bill 251

[Assembly Bill \(AB\) 251\(Ward, Chapter 320, Statutes of 2023\)](#) added California Government Code Section 14527.3 (Appendix A), which requires the California Transportation Commission (Commission) to convene a task force to study the relationship between vehicle weight and injuries to vulnerable road users (such as pedestrians and cyclists) and degradation to roads, and to study the costs and benefits of imposing a passenger vehicle weight fee.

AB 251 requires the Task Force to prepare a report summarizing its findings, which will inform the Commission's forthcoming report to the Legislature. The findings included in this report are described in Chapter 2 and cover the following topics identified in the legislation:

- An analysis of the relationship between passenger vehicle weight and vulnerable road user injuries and fatalities;
- An analysis of the relationship between passenger vehicle weight and degradation of road infrastructure;
- A discussion of how a passenger vehicle weight fee may change driver behavior;
- A discussion of how any revenues generated by the imposition of a passenger vehicle weight fee could be directed to enhance road infrastructure that increases safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other vulnerable road users; and,
- An analysis of the equity considerations relating to different population groups in the state, including persons of various demographic groups, persons residing in various regions of the state, persons with low incomes, and persons using a vehicle for commercial use versus personal use, and any appropriate adjustments for these considerations.

2. About the Task Force

2.1 Membership

AB 251 specifies that the Task Force shall consist of state agencies, including the Office of Traffic Safety and the Department of Motor Vehicles, local transportation agencies, safety advocates, and representatives from the automobile industry. The Commission approved the Task Force membership listed in Table 1 below.

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Table 1: List of Task Force Members for the Vehicle Weight Safety Study

Task Force membership list as approved by the California Transportation Commission, December 2024.

NO.	ORGANIZATION	TYPE
1	Alliance for Automotive Innovation	Automotive Industry
2	American Automobile Association	Automotive Industry
3	California New Car Dealers Association	Automotive Industry
4	California Farm Bureau	Business/Labor Organization
5	United Contractors	Business/Labor Organization
6	California City Transportation Initiative	Local Agency Consortium
7	California State Association of Counties	Local Agency Consortium
8	Safe Streets Research	Research Organization
9	Active San Gabriel Valley	Road User Safety Organization
10	American Association of Retired Persons	Road User Safety Organization
11	National Federation of the Blind, CA	Road User Safety Organization
12	Streets for All	Road User Safety Organization

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Table 1 Continued: List of Task Force Members for the Vehicle Weight Safety Study
Task Force membership list as approved by the California Transportation Commission, December 2024.

NO.	ORGANIZATION	TYPE
13	California Department of Motor Vehicles	State Agency
14	California Highway Patrol	State Agency
15	California Office of Traffic Safety	State Agency

3. Purpose and Scope

Task Force members are representative of experts in the field of transportation, industries and those potentially impacted by the scope of AB 251 across the State. Therefore, the Task Force is intended to illuminate diverse viewpoints to ensure that the legislative requirements are addressed from a broad representation of stakeholders, particularly those who stand to be most impacted by the recommendations in the Commission’s report to the Legislature on the Vehicle Weight Safety Study. Table 2 below provides further information about the scope and timeline of the Vehicle Weight Safety Study.

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Table 2: Anticipated Timeline for the Vehicle Weight Safety Study

The anticipated timeline for the Vehicle Weight Safety Study includes legislatively mandated activities (such as convening the Task Force and the development of a Summary of Task Force Findings) and other activities, culminating in the submission of the final Vehicle Weight Safety Study to the legislature.

MILESTONE	TIMING
University of California, Berkeley Academic Research Study	August 2024 - December 2025
Task Force Public Meetings (5 in total)	June - November 2025
Summary of Task Force Findings	November 2025
Presentations to the Interagency Equity Advisory Committee (EAC) and Commission on the Task Force Findings Summary	December 2025
Draft Vehicle Weight Safety Study Report Public Workshop	Early 2026 (tentative)
30-Day Public Comment Period on the Draft Vehicle Weight Safety Study Report	Early 2026 (tentative)
Presentations to the EAC and Commission on the Draft Vehicle Weight Safety Study Report	Spring 2026 (tentative)
Adoption of the final Vehicle Weight Safety Study Report and Submission to the Legislature	Spring 2026 (tentative)

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Five (5) Task Force meetings were held between June and November 2025. Task Force meetings were held compliant with the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act. Generally, Task Force meetings followed a similar format, including an item summarizing feedback from Task Force members from the previous meeting, followed by a presentation from Commission staff and the UC Berkeley Research Team with information about the research findings, key takeaways, and questions to solicit feedback aimed at responding to the legislative requirements. Meeting materials were shared in advance of Task Force meetings with Task Force members and the public. After each Task Force meeting, a recording of the meeting was posted on the [Commission’s website](#). Feedback received during the Task Force meetings is described in Chapter 2, Task Force Findings. The meeting schedule and topics are included in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Vehicle Weight Safety Study Task Force Meeting Dates and Topics
The Task Force held five public meetings throughout 2025, covering all topics mandated by AB 251.

NO.	ORGANIZATION	TYPE
1	Kick-Off and Introduction to the Vehicle Weight Safety Study	June 13, 2025
2	Trends in Vehicle Fleet and Road Users Injuries and Fatalities	July 16, 2025
3	Introduction to Potential Policy Solutions and Road Degradation	September 9, 2025
4	Potential Policy Solutions: Vehicle Weight Fee and Consumer Behavior Response	October 29, 2025
5	Task Force Wrap-up	November 13, 2025

II. TASK FORCE FINDINGS

The key takeaways below were derived from the academic findings, with feedback and additional perspectives offered by Task Force members. The key takeaways are supported by the research literature, as described further in Appendix B. Task Force member feedback is included throughout this chapter.

Feedback received from Task Force members and the public included a range of perspectives and additional questions for further consideration. Any feedback received by Task Force members outside of the scope of the legislation is detailed at the end of the chapter. All findings outlined in this chapter will be considered by the Commission in its report on the Vehicle Weight Safety Study submitted to the Legislature.

The findings presented in this summary are intended to capture the breadth of the Task Force's discussion on the various topics presented. They do not imply consensus or agreement on all topics, and are intended to demonstrate where Task Force members' perspectives differ. The variety of perspectives reflected in these findings will be considered by the Commission in its report on the Vehicle Weight Safety Study submitted to the Legislature.

1. Key Takeaways: California Vehicle Fleet Trends

The key takeaways for California Vehicle Fleet Trends are listed below:

1.1 The weight of new passenger vehicles manufactured since the 1980s has continued to increase.

1.2 Over the next decade, SUVs are expected to overtake sedans as the most registered type of vehicle in California. SUVs are the fastest growing vehicle type registered in both rural and urban counties.

1.3 While SUVs are smaller than they were in the past, the average SUVs are 27% heavier, 19% taller and have 42% higher ground clearance than the average sedan.

1.4 Half of U.S. States have a weight-based fee for passenger vehicles for various purposes. California charges a weight fee for all commercial vehicles, which includes all pickup trucks (regardless of whether a pickup truck is registered for personal or commercial use).

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1.5 The average size (curb weight, height, ground clearance) of registered pickup trucks is growing faster than any other vehicle type. The average pickup truck registered in California is 47% heavier, 26% taller, and has 59% higher ground clearance than the average sedan.

1.6 Pickup trucks are 50% more prevalent in rural counties than urban counties.

1.7 Vehicle owners in the United States are holding on to their vehicles longer (12.6 years in 2024 v. 10.4 years in 2008) lengthening the time of the adoption of new vehicles with more safety features.

1.8 Hybrid and electric vehicles are heavier than standard internal combustion engine vehicles, with electric vehicles being the heaviest of the three. However, their share of registrations is small but increasing, with hybrids making up 6.5% of registrations and electric vehicles making up 5% of registrations.

Additional Task Force Feedback

Task Force members identified the following areas for further consideration:

- How federal safety regulations may have impacted vehicle weight and form over the past few decades.
- What factors contribute to Californians holding on to their vehicles for longer, how this might impact safety outcomes in different communities, and how this delays the adoption of safety features that might otherwise improve safety outcomes for vulnerable road users (such as advanced driver assistance systems) and whether a vehicle weight fee might increase the amount of time Californians hold on to their vehicles.
- Whether there are fewer smaller vehicles available to California consumers when compared to larger and heavier vehicles.

2. Key Takeaways: California Injury and Fatality Trends

The key takeaways for California Injury and Fatality Trends are listed below:

2.1 (a) Vehicle collisions resulting in fatalities and serious injuries of vulnerable road users have increased.

2.1 (b) Vehicle registrations in California show that vehicles purchased are increasingly heavier, taller, and higher.

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2.1 (c) SUVs, pickups, and sedans are all more frequently involved in crashes resulting in fatalities and serious injuries to pedestrians and bicyclists in both urban and rural areas. SUVs are the fastest growing vehicle type involved in crashes (197% ped, 171% bike) followed by sedans (183% ped, 171% bike) and pickup trucks (166% ped, 152% bike) (2010 – 2022).

2.1 (d) However, UC Berkeley’s research only shows correlation between these factors, not causation.

- This is due to the challenge of isolating vehicle weight from other factors (i.e., speed, vehicle features such as curb height, other factors redacted or not captured from crash reports, and more) involved in crashes, as well as other data limitations.

2.2 In both urban and rural areas, the majority of pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities and serious injuries are caused by sedans, which are the most registered vehicle type in California.

2.3 When controlling for population, pedestrian fatalities and serious injuries are more common in urban than rural areas.

2.4 When controlling for population, bicyclist fatalities and serious injuries are more common in urban than rural areas.

2.5 Fatalities for pedestrians have increased 71% since 2010

2.6 Fatalities for bicyclists have remained steady since 2010

2.7 Serious injuries for pedestrians have increased 44% since 2010

2.8 Serious injuries for bicyclists have increased 20% since 2010

2.9 Children pedestrians are 82% more likely to be killed if struck by a SUV versus a sedan.

2.10 When adjusting for population, pedestrian fatalities and serious injuries in disadvantaged areas are approximately 50% higher for all vehicle types.

2.11 Vehicle collisions involving pedestrians are more likely to occur at night and outside of intersections.

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Additional Task Force Feedback

Task Force members identified the following areas for further consideration:

- How behaviors of both vulnerable road users and drivers, including the use of in-vehicle entertainment and driver assistance systems, contribute to collisions.
- Opportunities to improve quality and scope of crash data.
- How California's vulnerable road user fatality and serious injury trends data compare to other states and other countries with stricter driving standards and whether California's driving regulations should be updated.
- How older vehicles may factor into collision trends presented, especially given that Californians hold on to their vehicles longer.
- How rideshare services and autonomous vehicles factor into collision trends presented.
- How effective are new National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) rulemaking, updates to the New Car Assessment Program, and more recent industry-wide standards aimed at improving safety outcomes for vulnerable road users when deployed in new vehicles.
- How electric vehicles compare to vehicles with internal combustion engines, which are heavier regardless of vehicle type (i.e., sedan, SUV, etc.), and whether the increased weight of electric vehicles has a negative impact on safety outcomes of vulnerable road users.

3. Key Takeaways: Potential Regulatory Responses

The key takeaways for Potential Regulatory Responses are listed below:

3.1 The federal government regulates how vehicles are designed (e.g., the inclusion of turn signals, airbags, and automatic emergency braking) and leads the testing and rating of the safety of new passenger vehicles on the market.

3.2 States can regulate how vehicles are maintained and operated by individuals (e.g., wearing a seatbelt, Smog Checks, and speed limits) where not preempted by federal law or regulation.

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3.3 In the United States, safety advancements have tended to focus on the safety of vehicle occupants as opposed to those outside the vehicle. This regulatory context has evolved recently, with the Biden Administration identifying the safety of those outside the vehicle as a priority for testing.

3.4 Other similar countries require vehicle testing for pedestrian collision outcomes.

Additional Task Force Feedback

Task Force members identified the following areas for further consideration:

- Whether other states or countries have implemented stricter licensing requirements to operate more dangerous passenger vehicles.
- Whether there may be higher collision or severe injury risk for people outside of a motor vehicle that encounter newer vehicles with improved safety features due to drivers using less caution when operating a motor vehicle due to over-reliance on new safety features.
- Whether the role of traffic enforcement, or lack thereof, influences the rate of serious injuries and fatalities of vulnerable road users.
- To what degree funding challenges faced by local agencies influence making safety improvements to the built environment to reduce fatalities and serious injury rates of vulnerable road users.

4. Key Takeaways: Potential Built Environment Responses

The key takeaways for Potential Built Environment Responses are listed below:

4.1 In general, the design of vehicle, bicyclist, and pedestrian infrastructure influences the risk of crashes for all road users. Increased roadway lighting, crosswalk enhancements, traffic calming measures, and separated bicyclist and pedestrian infrastructure are associated with significant reductions in the risk and severity of crashes involving vulnerable road users.

4.2 The primary barriers to implementing infrastructure improvements that improve safety for vulnerable road users include: funding availability, implementing projects at scale, and jurisdictional challenges.

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4.3 Improvements to the built environment may result in and reveal inequities such as:

- Funding for local improvements is dependent largely upon the local tax base and regional formulaic funds, therefore improvements are more likely to occur in more affluent areas. However, improvements are also needed in low-income, rural, or areas where deaths, injuries, and worse health outcomes are more common due to the poor condition of the built environment.
- Investment in the built environment in less affluent areas could potentially accelerate gentrification and displacement.

Additional Task Force Feedback

Task Force members identified the following areas for further consideration:

- The role of land use in traffic safety.
- How the effectiveness of infrastructure investments and safety countermeasures intended for vulnerable road users changes with vehicle speed.
- Understanding that mode deconfliction may be a more reliable infrastructure investment to improve safety outcomes for vulnerable road users.

5. Key Takeaways: Vehicle Weight and Road Degradation

The key takeaways for Vehicle Weight and Road Degradation are listed below:

5.1 Passenger vehicles and smaller pickup trucks, including battery electric and fuel cell vehicles, have a very minor effect on pavement damage and rehabilitation costs - so much so that they are excluded from consideration from pavement damage calculations.

5.2 Road degradation changes exponentially (to the 4th power) with axle load. Compared to the 20,000 lb maximum legal single axle load (California), a 2,000 lb axle causes 0.01% of the damage, which is the approximate axle load distribution of both typical internal combustion engine and zero emission vehicles, a 5,000 lb axle causes 0.39% of the damage, which is the approximate axle load distribution of a heavier pickup truck and zero emission vehicle, a 10,000 lb load causes 6.25% of the damage, and a 25,000 lb load (not legal in California) causes 244% of the damage.

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5.3 Incremental increases in passenger vehicle weight are not anticipated to have a significant impact on road degradation.

6. Key Takeaways: Potential Weight-Based Fee Responses

The key takeaways for Potential Weight-Based Fee Responses are listed below:

6.1 Local and regional government bodies are responsible for managing local roads and the built environment in which their road users interact and can contribute to local infrastructure improvements through local taxes and other funding sources.

6.2 According to UC Berkeley, weight-based passenger vehicle fees could be conceptualized through the following policy mechanisms;

- Passenger vehicle registration fees;
- Passenger vehicle sales taxes;
- Tolls;
- Road usage charges; and,
- Parking fees.

6.3 If it were implemented, a weight-based passenger vehicle fee could be imposed as part of annual vehicle registration or to vehicle sales at the point-of-purchase.

6.4 Depending on the design of the fee, it could apply uniformly across all vehicles or assign differential fee amounts based on a variety of factors (e.g. class, weight, fuel type).

6.5 Fee exemptions could include professional occupation, income, fuel type, and other factors.

6.6 Weight-based toll fees may be challenging to implement when compared to vehicle registration fee or a point-of-sale fee. This is due to federal limitations restricting the development and operation of toll facilities and the allowable expenditures of toll revenues. Currently no states impose weight-based toll fees.

6.7 A road usage charge developed to replace the state fuel excise tax could include considerations such as passenger vehicle weight, if such a system were implemented.

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6.8 To address the decrease in available parking due to the increase in average vehicle size and safety risks to vulnerable road users on local roads, local governments could enact weight-based parking fees. Several U.S. cities either restrict parking permits to smaller vehicles or have implemented weight-based vehicle sticker fees.

6.9 There are potential equity impacts and positive and negative trade-offs associated with imposing a weight-based fee on heavier passenger vehicles. Positive outcomes could include incentivizing lighter weight vehicles and generating funding for improvements to infrastructure for vulnerable road users. Negative outcomes could include an increase in price for motor vehicles, particularly those that are heavier and may be required for larger families, for certain professions, or those with disabilities.

6.10 Other states impose vehicle weight fees using various fee structures, weight classifications, and other variables (such as fuel type) to determine the fee amount.

6.11 In California, California, revenues from passenger vehicle registration fees are currently distributed to state agencies and local governments for the administration and operation of California's transportation system and to fund transportation infrastructure improvements.

Additional Task Force Feedback

Task Force members identified the following areas for further consideration:

- Task Force members provided different perspectives on whether the State should implement a passenger vehicle weight fee. Some Task Force members articulated a desire for more evidence linking specific vehicle features (e.g., vehicle weight, size, or hood design) to safety outcomes. Task Force members also expressed concerns about the cost burden given rising vehicle costs and the high cost of living in California. Others noted the research evidence that larger vehicles that are involved in a collision are correlated with a higher severity of injuries and that waiting for additional research would delay important policy benefits. Despite these different perspectives, multiple Task Force members that expressed the importance of investment in transportation infrastructure to promote safety for all users if a passenger weight-based fee would be imposed.
- Whether regulating or imposing a fee based on passenger vehicle weight is an effective way to improve safety outcomes for vulnerable road users. Other proxies might directly improve safety outcomes such as reducing roadway speeds, etc.

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7. Key Takeaways: Consumer Behavior Response

The key takeaways for Consumer Behavior Response are listed below:

7.1 Modeling potential passenger vehicle weight fees suggests that the change in passenger vehicle purchase behavior would be dependent on the amount of the fee.

7.2 Revenue generated by the fee would also depend on the amount of the fee.

7.3 Depending on which vehicles are subject to a fee, there may be trade-offs between state priorities. Exemptions for certain vehicles could result in less revenue than uniform fees.

7.4 If heavier vehicles become more expensive to purchase and/or operate, people may be encouraged to switch to lighter ones.

7.5 If fees only apply to new vehicles, then people may switch to used vehicles and/or keep their existing vehicles longer. This may change used car prices.

7.6 Vehicles are expensive and last a long time, so consumers may take many years to respond to new fees.

7.7 Manufacturers could potentially respond to higher fees on heavier vehicles by lowering the weight of new vehicles. This could result in less revenue than predicted, but a larger reduction in the weight of vehicles on the road. This could also limit the types of vehicles available to consumers.

7.8 A lower fee would likely have a less significant impact on purchase behavior and generate less revenue.

7.9 With a one-time vehicle weight fee for all new passenger vehicles above 3,800 lbs set between 0% and 20% of the purchase price of a new vehicle, on a sliding scale by weight, modeling suggests the following outcomes by 2040:

- Heaviest 10% of vehicle weights would decline 2.5%;
- Mean weight of all vehicles on the road would decline 1.2%;
- Number of large SUVs would decline by 17%;
- Number of heavy and standard pickup trucks would decline by 10.5%;
- Annual revenues of \$4.6 billion;

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- Number of electric vehicles would decline by 2.3%;
- Number of plug-in hybrid vehicles would decline by 4.3%; and,
- Exempting electric vehicles and plug-in hybrid vehicles in this scenario would result in increased numbers of those vehicle types, offsetting the projected decline in average passenger vehicle weight and also substantially reducing projected annual revenues.

7.10 With an annual vehicle weight fee for all registered passenger vehicles above 3,800 lbs set at \$.10/lb. (the approximate mean weight of all vehicles registered in 2024), modeling suggests the following outcomes by 2040:

- Mean weight of all vehicles on the road would decline 0.26%;
- Number of large SUVs would decline by 4%;
- Number of heavy and standard pickup trucks would decline by 3%;
- Annual revenues of \$1.45 billion;
- Number of electric vehicles would decline by 0.4%; and,
- Number of plug-in hybrid vehicles would decline by 1%

7.11 While the two models cannot be directly compared, they suggest that consumers would have a stronger reaction to one-time point-of-sale fees for new vehicle purchases when compared to annual fees due to the perception that future costs (such as annual fees) may change and therefore are perceived as uncertain (hyperbolic discounting theory).

Additional Task Force Feedback

Task Force members identified the following areas for further consideration:

- Passenger vehicle weight fees might incentivize consumers holding on to older vehicles longer and delaying the purchase of newer vehicles, which are expected to have better safety technology features.
- Consider a revenue-neutral passenger vehicle weight fee on heavier vehicles, which could potentially decrease the weight of those vehicles over time and incentivize lighter vehicles.
- Consumer behavior modeling analysis is limited and does not fully assess the potential safety and economic impacts. It is intended as a tool to understand potential consumer responses to policy changes.
- Assess more detailed information about fee structures from other states that have imposed a passenger vehicle weight fee such as: vehicle features and capabilities such as but not limited to towing capacity.

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- Assess programmatic goals and actual outcomes from other states that have imposed a passenger vehicle weight fee such as: the intent of the fee and what the fee revenues are used for, consumer behavior response, safety outcomes for vulnerable road users, how fees are being allocated, etc.
- Determine the goal or goals of California's passenger vehicle fee – whether that is to change purchasing behavior (i.e., reduce the weight of vehicles purchased), generate revenue to invest in improving safety outcomes for vulnerable road users, and/or other goals.
- Why consumers are choosing certain vehicles, including whether consumers know about the associated fees before they purchase a vehicle.
- Whether a passenger vehicle weight fee would have unintended impacts such as encouraging older vehicles to remain on the road longer, shifting vehicle registration to other states that either have a minor or no vehicle weight fee, or resulting in mode shift due to consumers opting not to own and drive vehicles.

III. OTHER TOPICS IDENTIFIED BY TASK FORCE MEMBERS FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

Other topics identified by Task Force members outside of the scope of UC Berkeley's research and the Task Force process are included below for further consideration in the Commission's report to the legislature.

Enforcement: Task Force members inquired about the effect of enforcement of traffic laws on traffic safety and whether enforcement has changed in recent years.

Fee Versus Tax: Given that the legislation directs the Task Force to study a vehicle weight fee, a member of the Task Force suggested that such a fee might better meet the legal definition of a tax. How a potential cost associated with vehicle weight is constructed legislatively will inform if it meets the legal requirements of a tax or a fee.

Incentivizing Versus Disincentivizing: Task force members noted that fee-based policy solutions could work by incentivizing smaller, lighter vehicles, disincentivizing larger, heavier vehicles, or doing both simultaneously. Relatedly, fee-based policy solutions could target different objectives, including changing California's fleet makeup or generating revenue for safety investment.

Insurance: Task Force members discussed the topic of automobile insurance. Larger vehicles typically have higher insurance premiums, but because this information is proprietary, there is no shared understanding regarding how rates are determined and the average cost to insure a heavier vehicle more broadly.

Motor Vehicle Nonoccupant Safety Rating: Given the existing motor vehicle occupant safety standards and rating system, Task Force members discussed the pros and cons of developing a safety rating for both occupants of other motor vehicles and those outside of a motor vehicle. A nonoccupant safety rating may require that vehicles manufactured and sold are safer for those outside of a vehicle, whereas it could be difficult and costly to develop and run due to the difficulty identifying prevailing factors that contribute to collisions.

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Perceptions of Safety: Task Force members discussed the topic of perceptions of safety. Task Force members wondered if the perception of vehicles becoming larger results in decreased feelings of safety for road users. Older adults, some of whom may be unable to drive, were brought up in this discussion.

Unique Vehicle Needs: Task Force members recognized that different individuals have different needs when it comes to vehicle ownership. For example, construction workers may bring their personal vehicles to job sites and need to be able to transport equipment. Individuals with children may require larger vehicles with sufficient seating and space. Those with disabilities may need larger or heavier vehicles to assist with their mobility needs.

Unsafe Driving Behavior: Task Force members discussed policy approaches that would target unsafe driving behavior and improved monitoring of the competency of those licensed to drive a passenger vehicle, particularly those operating heavier passenger vehicles. A member of the Task Force wondered if there might be a relationship between heavier vehicles and higher speeds.



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