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Merritt Parkway Conservancy Supports 'No Truck on Highway' Warnings on GPS Apps

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The Merritt Parkway Conservancy appreciates and fully supports U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal's strong initiative requesting providers of GPS navigation software to add no-truck warnings for roads where trucks are banned.

For most of the last 80 years, you could drive your car on the Merritt Parkway with reasonable confidence that you were safe in a stream of other cars, protected by prominent signs at each entry point prohibiting trucks.

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And it is safe to say that 95 years ago, when Congressman Schuyler Merritt advanced his vision of separating <https://darientte.com> new route restricted to cars through his Fairfield County district he never imagined a future when artificial intelligence would invite trucks to join you in the flow, unleashing them as unguided missiles, threatening your life, limb and your surrounding environment.

But that moment arrived during the past decade, and this is the problem that Senator Blumental's positive action aims to remedy — getting trucks off the Merritt Parkway where they do not belong — by convincing the GPS service providers to fix the problem they originated and have refused to correct to date.

GPS software can be programmed to prevent routing trucks to prohibited roads, and responsible carriers subscribe to such commercially available accurate systems. But most free apps loaded on smart phones—now the navigational norm and widely popular—are not.

Our state police report that most violators of the truck ban enter the Merritt following these free apps, unfamiliar with local conditions and completely unaware that they are not allowed to be there.

GPS service providers of some of the programs in widest use, such as WAZE, have consistently refused to correct their programs when informed of this by public sector transportation agencies and private sector organizations like the Merritt Parkway Conservancy who protect America's scenic byways and historic roads. It is not just Connecticut's problem, but a national safety problem in need of a national solution.

The Merritt and Wilbur Cross Parkways, designed for the exclusive use of non-commercial automobiles bans trucks or anything in tow by statute for reasons of safety.

Semis and many straight trucks do not clear the parkway's bridges, and most trailers are too long to safely handle the tight curves of some on and off ramps.

The rigs themselves menace legal drivers, blocking views of the winding road ahead or panic swerving to the center of the road or stopping to prevent collision with bridges.

Even when no injuries occur, the costs of repairing bridges and guide rails, and cost of lost time to legal drivers stopped while backing a truck off the parkway are high and unnecessary.

This is not a problem with an engineering solution. The situation at the King Street bridge where the Merritt joins the Hutchinson River Parkway demonstrates the extent of measures that New York State DOT has taken to treat the symptoms of the problem without success.

Despite \$1.8 million in warning devices such as signage, audible signals, painted markings on the roadway and lighting, the King Street bridge has been hit 150 times in the last decade, 24 times in last year alone.

- **SEE ALSO:** [We're Not Doing a Great Job of Keeping Trucks Off the Merritt: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Dec. 12, 2019)

It is time to put federal regulations in place requiring GPS navigation app providers to provide accurate wayfinding information by not directing trucks onto truck restricted roads.

The current proposal in Connecticut to toll trucks on interstate highways, giving added incentive for truckers to seek alternative routes like our parkways, makes this more urgent. It will be up to all of us to follow Senator Blumenthal's leadership to set new standards for GPS navigation systems and see that they are made into law.

News Release from U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal

U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), joined by Senators Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.), and Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.), today called upon Google, Apple, and Waze to upgrade their GPS apps to provide height and weight restrictions to commercial drivers.

Low bridges, including those on the Merritt and Wilbur Cross Parkways in Connecticut, Hutchinson Parkway in New York, and Storrow Drive in Boston, are frequently struck by oversized vehicles where drivers are using GPS applications designed for passenger vehicle drivers.

While truck-specific smartphone navigation applications already exist to help truck drivers avoid restrictions like low bridges and other commercial vehicle prohibitions, they often require subscriptions for full functionality, limiting their usage.

“In recent years, many drivers have shifted from using standalone global position system (GPS) units to smartphone-based navigation applications like Google Maps, Apple Maps, or Waze.

These services offer valuable directions for passenger traffic but do not currently make information about national road restrictions like those on height, weight, or hazardous materials available to users.

As a result, commercial vehicle operators that rely on these applications are often directed to enter restricted roadways, which can cause accidents that adversely impact traffic patterns, inflict damage to roadways and overpasses, and even result in fatalities,” the Senators wrote in a letter sent to Google, Apple, and Waze.

Text: Letter Sent to Google, Apple, and Waze

The full text of the letter sent to the companies is copied below:

In recent years, many drivers have shifted from using standalone global position system (GPS) units to smartphone-based navigation applications like Google Maps, Apple Maps, or Waze.

These services offer valuable directions for passenger traffic but do not currently make information about national road restrictions like those on height, weight, or hazardous materials available to users.

As a result, commercial vehicle operators that rely on these applications are often directed to enter restricted roadways, which can cause accidents that adversely impact traffic patterns, inflict damage to roadways and overpasses, and even result in fatalities.

We write today to urge Google to help solve these safety issues by providing clear and timely notification to commercial vehicle drivers about restrictions in their route.

As more commercial vehicle drivers use these applications, we can expect accidents and damage to roadways to increase, unless a solution is found. For example, the Hutchinson River and Merritt Parkways in Connecticut and New York provide passenger vehicle drivers with an alternative to congested interstates.

The parkways prohibit travel by commercial vehicles because of low overpass clearances along the road. Unfortunately, commercial vehicles frequently travel on the parkways and strike their bridges. In fact, oversized vehicles struck the King Street Bridge on the border of Greenwich, Connecticut and Rye Brook, New York, nearly 150 times in the last decade.

Even when drivers recognize their mistake and stop prior to striking a bridge, traffic delays and fatalities occur. In 2017, a man died after rear-ending a truck that stopped short of the Stanwich Road Bridge in Greenwich, Connecticut.

Often, commercial vehicle accidents shut down the parkways. When this happens, commuters and travelers using the parkways face needless delays – negating the parkways’ intended purpose. Moreover, these accidents pose safety risks to all those traveling on the parkways.

Similar crashes are common in other areas of the country as well. In fact, reports indicate several accidents a year on the James Jackson Storrow Memorial Drive in Boston. Passenger vehicle drivers have become accustomed to using your application and turn to it when they rent commercial vehicles.

This has proved especially problematic when college students unfamiliar with the City of Boston rent moving trucks each September and are directed to Storrow Drive by their smartphone without a warning about its height restrictions.

These commercial-sized vehicles are unable to clear the overpasses on the route and have repeatedly interfered with local traffic. It is critical we work to ensure that these incidents do not repeat themselves.

Too often, commercial vehicle drivers blame their smartphone navigation applications for routing them onto restricted roads. While truck-specific smartphone navigation applications already exist to help truck drivers avoid restrictions like low bridges and other commercial vehicle prohibitions, they often require subscriptions for full functionality, limiting their usage.

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Instead of using this costly technology, commercial vehicle drivers often rely on your free services and do not fully appreciate that they do not include important information about road restrictions.

Integrating warning features into universally available navigation applications, like Google Maps, would make them more widely accessible, preventing further accidents. Your application already allows users to make choices about what kind of information is displayed to them. One possible solution is allowing users to indicate they are driving commercial vehicles and alerting them to restrictions on roadways.

We strongly urge your company to develop and implement solutions for commercial vehicle drivers relying on your navigation platform. It will undoubtedly reduce accidents and traffic delays caused by commercial vehicles operating on restricted roads. We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to your response.