



walk

massachusetts

COMMUNITY | MOBILITY | ACCESS

BY MARION DAVIS / WALKMASSACHUSETTS BOARD MEMBER

What you can't see: Study finds big blind zones in trucks

Have you ever walked or biked by a truck and wondered if the driver even knows you're there? A landmark study by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) shows that a large share of vehicles in its fleet and those of key municipalities have major blind zones that can leave drivers unaware of vulnerable road users until it is too late.

The authors will be honored with a Golden Shoe Award at our Annual Celebration on April 9.

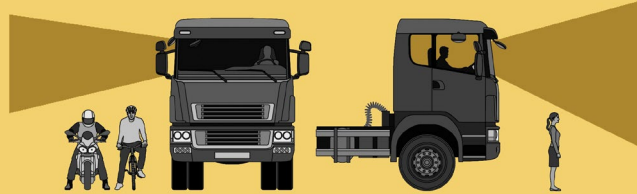
The study, required by a 2022 state law and conducted in partnership with the federal John A. Volpe National Transportation Systems Center, measured how much direct vision is available to drivers of 60 types of vehicles used by MassDOT and nine cities, including Boston: from massive Mack trucks (heavy-duty), to large Ford and Chevrolet trucks (medium-duty), to smaller trucks and vans (light-duty) – as well as some alternatives available on the market.

In particular, the study team gauged the nearest point at which an adult and an

elementary school-age child would be directly visible to a driver in a standard crosswalk and a buffered bike lane. Direct visibility is key because research has shown that when drivers directly see a person, they can react about 50% faster than when they see the person indirectly.

The results raise serious safety concerns: 50% of the heavy-duty vehicles were found not to provide direct visibility of a child in a crosswalk in front of the vehicle, for example; 90% of the trucks could not see a child in the bike lane, and 80% could not see an adult in a bike lane.

There are large differences in visibility even within vehicle classes, however. While drivers in the best-performing heavy-duty truck could see a child at 3.41 feet, for example, for half the trucks the distance exceeded 10 feet, and for the two worst performers, 15 feet.



Notably, drivers in all but three of the 20 medium-duty trucks tested – including many models used widely by the general public (e.g. Ford F-350 and F-450) *continued*

BY IOLANDO SPINOLA / WALKMASSACHUSETTS SENIOR PROGRAM DIRECTOR

North Shore residents trained to conduct walk audits

Residents of at least eight communities joined WalkMassachusetts staff for a half-day Walk Audit Academy training seminar on the North Shore on January 25, organized with the Beverly Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC).

Carl Kooyoomjian, chair of BPAC, brought together local advocates who had collaborated before on bike lane and resurfacing projects that crossed municipal boundaries. Participants learned about improving walkability and creating safer, more accessible communities.

Building on feedback from past Walk Audit Academies in Worcester and Springfield, the North Shore training included a demonstration walk audit in downtown Beverly, so all participants could get hands-on experience before preparing to lead their own walk audits.

BPAC intends to complete a series of ward-based audits informed by incident data, routes to schools, and councilor input on residents' concerns. The goal is to materially complete the audits by early May and have a formal City Council review in late May. The initial schedule has been planned to coincide with budget discussions for the remainder of the year.

A special thank-you to Gentile Brewing for hosting us! We look forward to seeing the results of BPAC's efforts and to collaborate more in the future.

If you're interested in leading a walk audit in your community, contact us to arrange an in-person training, or start with our Walk Audit Academy video series and supporting materials, which take you through every step of the process: www.walkmass.org/waa.

BY BRENDAN KEARNEY / WALKMASSACHUSETTS CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Legislative update: Truck safety and traffic cameras

Just over two years after a major traffic safety law went into effect in Massachusetts, large trucks are being required to add safety devices, including side guards, convex mirrors, crossover mirrors, and back-up cameras.

As highlighted by the study discussed above, drivers of many large trucks have a very limited view of people walking and biking near their vehicles. The new requirement aims to improve visibility, prevent crashes, and save lives.

MassDOT regulations adopted under An Act to Reduce Traffic Fatalities require any truck with a gross vehicle weight rating above 10,000 lbs. that was leased or purchased by the Commonwealth after January 1, 2023, or is operated under a contract executed after January 1, 2025, to be equipped with the new safety devices.

This requirement also applies to snow and ice removal and Commonwealth towing contracts executed on or

after July 1, 2025, with certifications of compliance required by the year's end.

A bill now before the Massachusetts Legislature (S.2343, An Act Expanding Truck Safety Requirements) would extend the safety device requirement to municipal and utility vehicles. We support this bill and will track its progress, and encourage you to urge your legislators to support it as well.

Traffic camera bills

Two new traffic camera bills signed by Gov. Maura Healey in January could also make pedestrians, transit riders and schoolchildren safer. The first allows the MBTA and regional transit authorities to mount cameras on buses and issue fines of \$25–125 for illegally using bus lanes, and \$100 for blocking a bus stop. Municipalities may also set up cameras at bus stops to prevent illegal parking and help ensure people can safely board buses. *continued*

spring 2025

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Calendar

Annual Celebration
April 9, 5:30-8PM
Livestream starts @ 6:30

5:30-6:30 Eat | Drink | Schmooze
6:30 Presentation & hybrid begin

Keynote:
Etel Haxhiaj: Worcester City Councilor

Golden Shoes:
Samuels & Associates/Lyrik
Direct Vision Study
Etel Haxhiaj: Worcester City Councilor

Locations:
CIC/Venture Cafe
One Broadway, 5th Floor
Cambridge

Sign up: walkmass.org/register
(Hybrid option when registering)

Stats

Beat the Bay State
This was our biggest year yet!
Thanks to all who donated or participated
57,790 total miles logged
\$23,346 raised through fundraising
\$16,500 corporate supporters
655 participants
38 teams total

Crash Report: Late March release
Findings indicate that in 2024, over one in five (21%) fatal motor vehicle crashes in Massachusetts involved a person walking getting hit by the driver of a car. Our fourth annual report tracking pedestrian deaths from motor vehicles throughout the Commonwealth will be available at: www.walkmass.org/fatal24

Blind zones cont.

– could not directly see a child from less than 4 feet away. Light-duty trucks and vans performed much better, with drivers in three of the eight models able to see a child at less than 2 feet from the front bumper. Still, there was a 10-fold difference between the best-performing vehicle and the worst.

The key takeaway from the study is that vehicle choice makes a major difference for pedestrian safety. Smaller vehicles should be used whenever possible, the authors advised, and within size categories, higher-visibility models should be chosen (given five stars in the report).

The study also found that visibility in legacy models of vehicles appears to be decreasing, but there are new options on the market with much better visibility. For example, a driver in the medium-duty 2024 model REE P7C could see a child as close as 1.53 feet from the bumper. Similarly, among the heavy-duty vehicles measured, those with a cab-forward design tended to have higher forward visibility. Some, but not all, also had more side visibility.

MassDOT has adopted a Safe System Approach to road safety, which entails analyzing and addressing every aspect of the transportation system to improve safety. Safer vehicles is a key element of this, and the findings will inform future MassDOT truck fleet investments.

Learn more: www.mass.gov/info-details/direct-vision-study.



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Boston MA 02109
walkmass.org

mission

WalkMassachusetts makes walking safer and easier in Massachusetts to encourage better health, a cleaner environment, and more vibrant communities.

SPRING 2025

Annual Celebration (hybrid): APRIL 9, 5:30—8
RSVP: walkmass.org/register

thank you!

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Legislation update cont.

The second bill allows school districts to mount cameras on school buses and cite drivers who illegally pass stopped school buses. As we highlighted in our 2023 Crash Report, a pilot program in Peabody that put cameras on 10 school buses for six weeks filmed 864 motorists passing buses with a stop arm out as students boarded or were dropped off.

We will report more as program requirements are outlined and implemented. Contact your local elected officials and encourage them to seize these opportunities to make streets safer!

Governor Healey's proposed fiscal year 2026 budget includes a provision to legalize the use of speed cameras in municipalities across the Commonwealth. MassDOT included automated enforcement as part of its most recent Strategic Highway Safety Plan, noting that it would require changing state law.

WalkMassachusetts has worked with fellow advocates in the Massachusetts Vision Zero Coalition in recent years to recommend safety camera programs that allow communities to manage speed while also protecting privacy through robust data protection and destruction policies. Traffic cameras are not a silver bullet, but they can be valuable tools for communities working to make streets safer for all users.