

The problem of texting while driving is one that has persisted due to its very nature as an individual habit which can be difficult to break. The National Safety Council has stated that cell phone use while driving is actually underreported (no test exists to conclusively determine who was using their phone behind the wheel and when in the same way that a breathalyzer indicates alcohol consumption, and people are often hesitant to admit that they have been texting behind the wheel), but it results in approximately 1.6 million accidents each year. A large factor in this is that, in the driver's mind, ignoring the phone could leave the person on the other end hanging. When one can't see the message and is left to imagine the possibilities, this can produce anxiety. In some cases, the chance that the message is important can be significant, and answering the phone can seem urgent. Drivers are very uncomfortable leaving their phones alone because they are uncomfortable leaving the person on the other end of the phone with a long silence. The reason this impulse is difficult to suppress is partly because the risk vs. reward assessment is so skewed; the dangers of glancing at one's phone seem relatively minimal compared to the conversational obligation that will be ignored if they don't check the phone.

My proposed solution is a relatively simple app that targets the conversational void that makes those who text while driving so uncomfortable. The app would be equipped with a sensor to determine whether the person carrying the phone was moving too quickly to be distracted (the popular game app *Pokémon Go* has already implemented similar speed-detection feature specifically to prevent distraction while driving, and some cars automatically lock their doors at a certain speed). If the user's speed surpassed a threshold indicating that they are driving, the app would connect to the phone and instant-message functions of a cellular device to provide an automated response whenever the phone receives a message. Ideally, this automated response would be customizable, much like an answering machine, so that the user can inform their messenger that they cannot reply at the moment in a friendly and personalized way that would make them the most comfortable with ignoring the phone while driving. For convenience's sake, the app would be given a feature accessible from the menu that would disable it so that passengers wouldn't be locked out of their messaging service. The effect of the app would linger for a minute to two minutes after slowing down (unless intentionally disabled) to account for parking time. The app could include an emergency feature that reads messages aloud automatically in a crisis situation as determined by the sender, though there is no way to prevent abuse of that feature without making it inflexible. In the long run, perhaps this setting could be shipped with phones as a default feature.

This app would not completely remove the hazard of texting while driving (the nature of the problem makes it very impractical to do so), but it would remove one of the major anxieties of ignoring a phone while driving. The app would also make a normally one-second decision to use a phone into a several-second process if need be, discouraging drivers from casually glancing at their phone without much thought. Because my solution targets the personal habits of conversation that make texting while driving such a difficult problem to eradicate, I believe that it has real potential to help reduce the frequency of incidents caused by texting while driving significantly.