

US President Donald Trump's administration has cancelled plans to require V2V (vehicle-to-vehicle) communication provisions in new cars—a move experts say kills one of the most promising technologies for preventing traffic deaths.

The previous Obama administration proposed last December that all new cars and light trucks should be required to come equipped with V2V technology to transmit their location, speed, direction and other information 10 times per second, letting cars "know" to avoid a crash when for example, another vehicle is about to run a red light or come around a blind turn.



The Trump government has decided not to pursue a final V2V mandate, according to auto industry officials who have spoken with White House and DOT officials, as well as others whose organisations have spoken to the administration—all anonymously, so as not to jeopardise their relations with the administration.

The White House has declined to comment, but the V2V proposal has been dropped from the White House Office of Management and Budget's list of regulations actively under consideration. Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao's office forwarded a statement from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration which said the agency is still reviewing more than 460 comments on the proposed mandate before deciding its next step and that no final decision has been made. But industry officials say the decision has already been made at higher levels of the government, and Trump administration officials claim their decision was based on factors including distaste for imposing mandates on industry, even though industry officials say most automakers support requiring V2V. Trump has made a conspicuous priority of slashing government regulations, which he sees as an impediment to commerce and a drag on the economy.

The Department of Transportation says V2V has the potential to prevent or mitigate up to 80 percent of collisions that don't involve alcohol or drugs. V2V was also expected to provide an extra layer of safety for self-driving cars, since it can detect even vehicles hidden by buildings or beyond the range of the sensors and cameras of autonomous vehicles. And it was expected to ease traffic congestion, since vehicles could communicate with traffic signals—turning them green to prevent needless waiting, save fuel and reduce emissions, for example.

Deborah Hersman, President of the U.S. National Safety Council, says V2V "one of the most important tools for reducing traffic fatalities", and laments Trump's move. "The only way you're going to get it adopted and deployed in a widespread manner is by having a mandate", she says, though she adds that the previous Obama administration is also to blame for having delayed the proposal.

Industry officials say another reason for scuttling the V2V mandate is strong opposition from the cable and tech industries. In 1999 the U.S. Government set aside the 5.9-GHz spectrum band for transport technologies, but it went unused while the government and automakers spent over a decade and more than USD \$1bn developing and testing V2V. Spectrum is finite and in short supply, and cable and tech companies have been seeking permission to use the 5.9 GHz spectrum to build out their wireless bandwidth. Automakers contend they need the entire 5.9 GHz spectrum for V2V and other safety uses.

It will be more difficult for automakers to protect the 5.9 GHz spectrum and deployment will be far slower without a mandate, industry officials say. Some European manufacturers say they want V2V, but it might be better to wait super-fast 5G cellular technology to achieve it instead of currently available technology. But 5G is still being developed, and years of testing would be required after it's ready before it could go into cars. Automakers wanted the mandate partly because it would establish V2V protocols to ensure all equipped vehicles can communicate regardless of brand or country of origin, and to bring V2V onto the roads quicker. Half of new vehicles would have been required to have V2V within two years after a final rule was issued, and all new vehicles within four years. The more vehicles equipped with V2V, the more collisions that could be avoided. It would still take many years before there were enough vehicles with V2V to reap the technology's full promise, though that might be accelerated by aftermarket devices that would bring V2V to older vehicles.

Traffic fatalities have surged over the past two years to 37,461 deaths in 2016, up nearly 5,000 deaths from 2014—the largest two-year increase since the early 1960s. Michigan Department of Transportation director Kirk Steudle is disappointed the mandate has been scrapped: "The longer we wait, the more people die", he says.