

DOT Should Take Steps to Address Risks Related to Limited Driver Visibility

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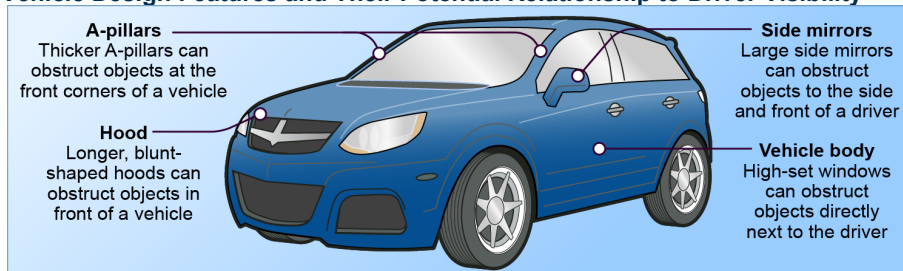
A report to congressional requesters

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What GAO Found

The size of passenger vehicles on U.S. roads has grown over the past 30 years. Selected studies that GAO reviewed generally found that larger vehicles, certain design features (see figure), and turning maneuvers may limit a driver's visibility and pose greater risks to pedestrians and cyclists. Data on driver visibility, such as the size of blind zones around a vehicle, are not readily available. As such, GAO used turning maneuvers to analyze the potential relationship between vehicle type and involvement in fatal pedestrian crashes. GAO found that larger vehicles had higher odds of turning compared with going straight in fatal pedestrian crashes than cars in the same scenarios. For example, heavy-duty trucks (e.g., semi-trucks) had at least 12 times the odds compared with cars.

Vehicle Design Features and Their Potential Relationship to Driver Visibility



Source: GAO analysis of selected studies related to vehicle design and driver visibility. | GAO-26-107954

Auto and truck manufacturers that GAO interviewed have developed technologies to help mitigate limited driver visibility, such as side bicyclist alerts and pedestrian automatic emergency braking. Manufacturers have also conducted testing and benchmarking of their vehicles to assess driver visibility.

Two selected foreign jurisdictions—the European Union (EU) and London, England—have taken steps to reduce risks to pedestrians and cyclists related to limited driver visibility. The EU has adopted driver visibility standards that auto and truck manufacturers must meet. While similar regulations also apply in the United Kingdom, London has developed a driver visibility standard that requires some commercial truck operators to install additional safety equipment.

The Department of Transportation (DOT) has recognized risks to pedestrians and cyclists related to driver visibility but has not fully analyzed those risks or developed responses. DOT has conducted some research and begun to collect data that could be useful in conducting such an analysis. However, it has not analyzed specific risks that limited driver visibility may pose to pedestrians and cyclists, such as those related to turning maneuvers or vehicle design features. DOT has not done so because, in part, it has not determined a method to measure driver visibility in cars and trucks. Such a method could provide data on the size of blind zones and enable DOT to fully analyze the extent to which they pose risks to pedestrians and cyclists. Fully analyzing specific risks would also provide DOT with the information it needs to respond to them, and would better position DOT to meet its goal of reducing roadway fatalities.

Why GAO Did This Study

In 2024, about 9,200 pedestrians and cyclists were killed on U.S. roadways—an increase of about 65 percent since 2010. A range of factors can contribute to increased pedestrian and cyclist fatalities, including larger vehicles, which make up an increasing share of vehicles on U.S. roadways and may limit driver visibility.

GAO was asked to review issues related to driver visibility. This report examines (1) what studies and federal data show about the relationship between vehicle characteristics, driver visibility, and pedestrian and cyclist fatalities; (2) actions selected auto and truck manufacturers have taken related to driver visibility; (3) approaches selected foreign jurisdictions have used to reduce driver visibility-related risks to pedestrians and cyclists; and (4) the extent to which DOT has analyzed and responded to potential driver visibility-related risks to pedestrians and cyclists.

GAO reviewed selected studies published from 2015 to 2025, analyzed DOT pedestrian fatality data, and selected and interviewed five auto and five truck manufacturers. GAO also reviewed driver visibility standards adopted by the EU and London and interviewed officials about their approaches. Finally, GAO reviewed DOT studies and planning documents and interviewed DOT officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that DOT (1) determine a method to measure driver visibility, and (2) fully analyze risks that limited driver visibility poses to pedestrians and cyclists and develop responses to those risks. DOT concurred with the first recommendation and did not concur with the second. GAO continues to believe DOT should fully implement both recommendations, as discussed in the report.