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## Some states, including Missouri, consider whether to ban Google Glass while driving

BY ALLISON PRANG

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Google Glass, the latest wearable computer technology from the internet search giant, were loaned to four members of the Kansas City Symphony on Friday as part of collaboration between the symphony and Engage Mobile, a mobile development and strategy firm, to show viewers what it is like to be in a symphony orchestra. THE KANSAS CITY STAR

**JEFFERSON CITY** — As states struggle to stop drivers from texting their way to tragedy, along comes more potentially distracting technology.

Wearable electronics — notably Google Glass — have spooked some lawmakers and spurred at least one closely watched court case. The gadgets stoke fears that drivers looking at a miniature screen hanging in front of one eye might lose track of the road in front of their headlights.

Yet advocates of the glasses-mounted computers say looking slightly to the side for directions beats fumbling with the smartphone sliding around in your lap.

Google is, sometimes pre-emptively, fighting to stop Google Glass from getting legislated into futility before it hits the open market.

Missouri was among eight states considering a ban on the use of such devices while driving. But the sponsor of a bill that would have outlawed the gadgets in the driver seat has deleted that section from his bill.

Rep. Don Gosen, a Republican from suburban St. Louis, said he made the change before talking with a lobbyist hired by Google in Jefferson City. Yet Reuters reports that the California Internet giant has been hiring lobbyists to pitch the case for a less fettered Google Glass in state capitols across the country.

Legislators in Missouri, Illinois, Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, West Virginia and Wyoming have all considered legal checks on drivers using wearable electronics, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Google Glass fits on a user's face like a pair of eyeglasses and sports a thumbnail-size screen. It connects to a nearby smartphone and allows a wide range of functions — texting, Web browsing, navigation, taking photos or videos — by swiping the side of the device or uttering voice commands.

So far, it's been sold to a test market of technophiles. It could become available to a wider range of consumers late this year.

That sort of gizmo was imagined in the original version of his bill, which would have prohibited someone from driving while using a “head-mounted optic display.”

“Personally, I think it would be very distracting,” Gosen said, depending on what someone was doing with Google Glass. He said he cut the ban from the bill — which would impose tougher penalties for texting while driving — because it can be difficult to prove whether a device was turned on or distracting.

Existing Missouri law makes it illegal for the operator of a commercial vehicle or anyone 21 or younger to “send, read or write a text message” while driving.

Gosen's bill would make it illegal for people of all ages to text while driving drive. It would also increase the penalties.

Missouri Highway Patrol spokesman Tim Hull said he couldn't comment on pending legislation.

Richard Brownlee was most recently registered as a lobbyist for Google with the Missouri Ethics Commission starting Jan. 22, 2013. Before that, he was registered as a Google lobbyist from mid 2011 through late 2012. His lobbying clients also include members of the insurance industry. He declined to comment for this story.

A Google spokeswoman would not comment on the company's lobbying efforts but said in an email that Google has not researched the safety of driving while using Google Glass.

"Technology issues are a big part of the current policy discussion in individual states and we think it is important to be part of those discussions," the company's email said. "While Glass is currently in the hands of a small group of Explorers, we find that when people try it for themselves they better understand the underlying principle that it's not meant to distract but rather connect people more with the world around them."

Debate climbed about a need for Google Glass driving rules in October when Cecilia Abadie was stopped for speeding by the California Highway Patrol. She was wearing a Google Glass device at the time. An officer wrote her a ticket for violating a state law intended to prevent people from watching TV while driving.

The charge was ultimately tossed out by a traffic court that found not enough evidence existed to show that the Google Glass was turned on while she was driving.

Last year, Delaware, New Jersey and West Virginia proposed legislation regulating wearable computers, but none passed, said National Conference of State Legislatures policy specialist Anne Teigen. She also noted that some states, such as Oklahoma, have broader rules that might outlaw anything deemed to distract drivers.

"Distracted driving has been an issue for a long time and does not necessarily have to include technology," Teigen said. "But it has come to the forefront with cellphones and texting and new technology."

While its sale to the general public hasn't come yet, Google Glass does have a limited release in the wild. "Glass Explorers," as Google calls them, are people who made a successful pitch to the company to try the still-evolving product.

Jake Steinerman, an information technology worker in Michigan, said he wears his Google Glass constantly. He co-founded “DriveSafe,” an app for Google Glass to monitor a person’s driving to detect whether they are starting to fall asleep.

Steinerman said Glass can have benefits. Yet, he said, Glass is “more distracting than having no technology at all in the car.”

Wearing the Internet-connected glasses offers a safer alternative to glancing over at a smartphone while at the wheel, he said. With Glass, he argued, a person’s peripheral vision is still on the road while they’re looking at a text.

Jibo He, an assistant professor of psychology at Wichita State University, has also been studying driving safety with Google Glass.

He has compared drivers reading something on Google Glass to those using a smartphone, testing “performance in a simulated lane-changing task.”

“Although both Glass and smartphone use impaired driving performance, drivers were better able to maintain a steady lane position and had fewer lane excursions when using Google Glass than when using a smartphone,” he said in an unpublished manuscript. “Wearable technologies like Google Glass might reduce the impairment caused by looking down at a smartphone.”