

Will dashboard AM radio be saved?

Bipartisan bill would require automakers to keep it in new cars

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A line of unsold 2018 Cooper Clubmen sit in a long row at a Mini dealership, March 30, 2018, in Highlands Ranch, Colo. Lawmakers on Capitol Hill are pushing to keep AM radio in the nation's cars. A bipartisan group in Congress on Wednesday, May 17, 2023, introduced the "AM for Every Vehicle Act." The bill calls on the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to require automakers to keep AM radio in new cars at no additional cost. Credit: AP Photo/David Zalubowski, File

Lawmakers on Capitol Hill are pushing to keep AM radio in the nation's cars.

A bipartisan group in Congress has introduced the "AM for Every Vehicle Act." The [bill](#) calls on the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to require automakers to keep AM radio in new cars at no additional cost.

The legislation would also require automakers selling cars manufactured before the proposed regulation takes effect to let buyers know if the vehicles don't come with AM radios.

Supporters of preserving AM radio in cars cite public safety concerns. The sponsors of the [bill](#) put forth Wednesday note AM radio's historic role in transmitting vital information during emergencies, such as communication during natural disasters, especially to people in rural areas.

"Carmakers shouldn't tune out AM radio in new vehicles or put it behind a costly digital paywall," Sen. Edward Markey, D-Mass., one of the bill's sponsors, said in a statement. He added that the bill aims to "ensure that this resilient and popular communication tool does not become a relic of the past."

The proposed legislation comes as more automakers are dropping broadcast AM radio from their newer models. According to Markey's office, eight out of 20 major car companies—including Tesla, BMW and Ford—have removed it from their electric vehicles.

Carmakers cite interference from electric motors that can cause static and noise on AM transmissions. Some have suggested that [internet radio](#)

or other communication tools could replace AM radio. But Markey and others have pushed back—pointing to situations where drivers might not have [internet access](#).

"The truth is that broadcast AM radio is irreplaceable," Markey said [in March](#).

The Alliance for Automotive Innovation, a U.S. group that represents major automakers, criticized the proposed legislation, calling the AM radio mandate unnecessary.

The trade group pointed to the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Integrated Public Alerts and Warning System, which can distribute safety warnings across AM, FM, internet-based and satellite radios—as well as over cellular networks.

"This is simply a bill to prop up and give preference to a particular technology that's now competing with other communications options and adapting to changing listenership," the alliance said, while adding that automakers are committed to ensuring drivers have access to public alerts and safety warnings through IPAWS.

FEMA's IPAWS Director Antwane Johnson, however, underlined the important role that AM radio plays in emergency response.

"AM radio has been tested over and over during the most devastating natural disasters—and has withstood them all," Johnson said in a statement to The Associated Press on Thursday. "Additionally, broadcast radio is free and has the ability to reach millions of people from a single broadcast. Any plans to remove AM radio should be paired with a direct, suitable, proven and free alternative to receive critical information about potential threats to their safety."

The proposed legislation would also direct the Government Accountability Office to study whether "an alternative communication system" could replicate and have the same impact that AM radio has for transmitting emergency information.

The Federal Communications Commission and National Association of Broadcasters praised the legislation, which is also backed by Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, Rep. Josh Gottheimer, D-N.J., Rep. Tom Kean, Jr., R-N.J., Rep. Marie Gluesenkamp Perez, D-Wash., among others.

"Having AM radio available in our cars means we always have access to emergency alerts and key warnings while we are out on the road," FCC Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel said in a statement. "Updating transportation should not mean sacrificing access to what can be life-saving information."

According to the [National Association of Broadcasters](#) and Nielsen data, more than 80 million people in the U.S. listen to AM [radio](#) every month.

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