

UTC Spotlight

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Texas A&M University and San Diego State University



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Child Safety Seat Usage in Ride-Share Services

In a research project funded by the Safety through Disruption (Safe-D) National UTC, researchers at the Virginia Tech and Texas A&M Transportation Institutes are collaborating to study the current state of child ridership and child safety seat use in ride-share vehicles. Our goal is to understand how parents and caregivers currently transport children when using ride-share vehicles, how this behavior corresponds with child passenger safety laws across the United States, and how we can move the culture of child safety forward in this new era of ride-share transportation.



Figure 1. Amanda Eisele installs son Zachary's car seat.

Transporting children safely in ride-share vehicles has become a growing concern due to the increase in popularity of services such as Uber and Lyft, and the ongoing shift from owning a vehicle to using these services.¹ Unlike personally owned vehicles, ride-share vehicles do not generally have permanently installed child safety seats.

Complicating matters, many infant and convertible car seats are bulky and heavy, and some require a separate base, making it challenging to transport them outside of

vehicles. This combination of factors poses a serious safety concern for parents who need to protect their children both during day-to-day travel and in special circumstances such as vacations.

Real-world research into the use of child restraints in ride-share vehicles and taxis is crucial to the safe travel of our nation's children.

To better understand child seat use in ride-share vehicles, the project team is currently conducting research using several methods, including a nationwide review of applicable child restraint laws, a series of focus groups with parents of young children and drivers of ride-share vehicles, and a nationwide internet survey of ride-share users and drivers.

Review of Child Restraint Regulations

As a first step, the team conducted a review of child restraint laws across all 50 states and Washington, D.C. As restraint legislation is determined on a state-by-state basis, we found a wide variety of differences. These included ages covered, types of car seats required, seat location specificity, types of enforcement, and exemptions from the law. These regulation variations were summarized in a report that serves as a standalone reference document as well as a foundation for focus groups and surveys.

A total of 34 states exempt taxis and/or for-hire vehicles from their child restraint laws (Figure 2). However, it is rarely clear whether this also refers to ride-share vehicles. **Georgia is the only state that distinguishes between ride-sharing and other for-hire vehicles in its legislation.** In Georgia, taxis and other for-hire vehicles are excluded from child seat regulations, while ride-share vehicles are explicitly included. Clarifying how each state defines these services is essential to understanding how ride-share services are treated under law.

Focus Groups

The research team conducted six focus groups aimed at determining caregivers' and rideshare drivers' attitudes

¹ https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2977969

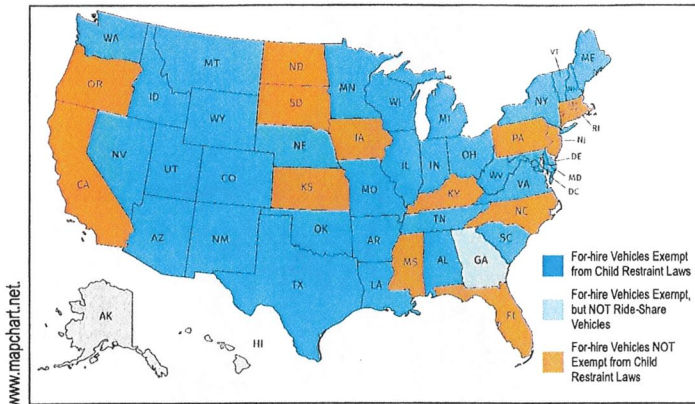


Figure 2. State-by-state exemptions for child seat restraint laws.

and practices regarding child safety in ride-share vehicles. These included four groups in College Station, TX, one in Dallas, and one in Houston. The 35 participants included 16 ride-share drivers (11 males, 5 females) and 19 parents/riders (11 females, 8 males).

Among the topics discussed were opinions about ride-sharing services; opinions on transporting young children in ride-sharing vehicles, personal vehicles, and other forms of transportation; personal experiences with ride-share services and driving with young children; and consumer and driver needs and recommendations.

While the focus group data are still being analyzed, key early findings include the following:

- Half of ride-share drivers reported not using safety seats when transporting young children. The other half reported using parent-provided seats.
- Most ride-share drivers and users believed that state child occupant protection laws should apply to ride-share vehicles.
- Most parents indicated they would feel comfortable transporting their children in a ride-share vehicle if the company provided a child safety seat and if the driver had some training in child passenger safety.
- Several parents believed that ride-share companies should have a mobile app option allowing users to request a child safety seat in the vehicle meeting the child's age and size requirements.

Nationwide Survey

As the final piece of the project, the team is conducting a nationwide internet survey of the experiences, attitudes, and opinions of parents, caregivers, and ride-share drivers. The survey is currently underway, and is expected to be complete by spring 2018.



Figure 3. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration public service ad illustrating the variety of safety seats used across a child's lifespan.

Project Outcome

This project will be completed in spring 2018, and will have several meaningful outcomes. First, it will provide a comprehensive and in-depth overview of how parents and caregivers currently transport their children when using ride-share services, and how this aligns with legal requirements around the country. Second, it will provide a valuable reference that parents, ride-share drivers, and others can use to identify child passenger regulations in their state. Finally, this project will provide suggestions and resources for continuing to ensure the safest possible travel for children.

About This Project

Justin M. Owens is a Research Scientist in the Center for Vulnerable Road User Safety at the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute. Katie Womack is a Sr. Research Scientist in the Center for Transportation Safety at Texas A&M Transportation Institute. This project is ongoing, and is anticipated to end in spring 2018. Inquiries may be directed to jowens@vtti.vt.edu. More information on this and other Safe-D research projects can be found on the Safe-D National UTC webpage at <https://www.vtti.vt.edu/utc/safe-d/>.

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