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April 5, 2021

Mr. Avi Bar
Head of Public Policy, Waze and Maps
Google, Inc.
1600 Amphitheater Parkway
Mountain View, CA 94043

Dear Mr. Bar:

I write to express my continued concern about the lack of critical information in smartphone-based navigation applications – like Google Maps and Waze. These applications are widely used by truckers and delivery drivers, but they lack vital information on road restrictions including reduced height clearance, vehicle weight limits on bridges, and prohibitions on the transport of hazardous material – omissions that pose significant risks to commercial vehicle drivers and to all drivers on our roads.

In your response to my letter about these safety issues on January 13, 2020, you state Waze and Google Maps are designed only for passenger vehicles and noted safety features you already include in your applications, such as speed limits. You also describe potential solutions you are considering for commercial vehicle drivers using your applications, such as education initiatives. However, no solution has yet been implemented and this problem has persisted with avoidable disastrous consequences – commercial vehicle drivers using these applications continue to be directed onto restricted roadways and are involved in accidents that create traffic delays, damage roadways and overpasses, and result in fatalities.

I urge you to take swift action to implement clear and timely warnings and notifications to commercial vehicle drivers about restrictions on their route.

As more commercial vehicle drivers use smartphone-based navigation applications and no action is taken, I fear these accidents and damages to roadways will continue. I described in my previous letter the numerous traffic delays that have occurred as a result of trucks striking overpasses with low clearance on the Hutchinson River and Merritt Parkways in Connecticut and New York, including the King Street Bridge on the border of Greenwich, Connecticut, and Rye

Brook, New York.¹ I also wrote about the death of a man in 2017 after a truck stopped short of the Stanwich Road Bridge in Greenwich, Connecticut.²

These accidents continue to occur. In the one week period from November 9, 2020, through November 15, 2020, New York State Police stopped nearly 200 trucks and issued 50 tickets during their enforcement effort to educate commercial vehicle drivers about the hazards of low bridges.³ Then, on February 23, 2021, a truck struck the King Street Bridge and spilled its cargo across the roadway, causing the northbound lanes to be closed for much of the morning and early afternoon.⁴ These incidents force travelers to sit through needless delays and pose safety risks to all people on the road.

Moreover, this problem is not isolated to the Hutchinson and Merritt Parkways. The Bridge Street railroad overpass in Northampton, Massachusetts, often referred to as the ‘truck-eating bridge,’ was struck by a tractor trailer in April 2020 and again in January 2021.⁵ On February 21, 2021, a tractor trailer was stuck under a low overpass clearance bridge in Northborough, Massachusetts, closing the road for four hours.⁶ In these cases, as well as numerous others around the country, state and local transportation departments have already installed warning devices such as signs and flashing lights to alert drivers to roadway restrictions. It is critical to integrate these warnings and notifications into widely-available navigation applications as well.

Your company has a significant role to play in averting these hazards. Often, truck drivers blame their Global Positioning Systems for leading them onto restricted roadways. While commercial vehicle-specific navigation systems do exist, access is often limited without paying a hefty fee for a subscription. As such, drivers turn to your services, which do not include all the necessary roadway information vital to planning their routes. Users of these navigation applications have routinely made you aware of these shortcomings and asked for you to address them.

¹ "Police: Truck overturns after hitting bridge deck on Merritt Parkway in Norwalk," News 12 (n.p.), December 15, 2019, <http://www.news12.com/story/41453610/police-truck-overturns-after-hitting-bridge-deck-on-merritt-parkway-in-norwalk>;

Robert Marchant, "King Street Bridge struck, again," Greenwich Time (Norwalk, CT), November 18, 2019, <https://www.greenwichtime.com/local/article/King-Street-Bridge-struck-again-14844466.php>.

² Cedar Attanasio and Jolm Nickerson, "Fatal Greenwich accident underscores trucks not fit for Menitt," CT Post (Norwalk, CT), November 3, 2017, <https://www.ctpost.com/local/article/Fatal-Greenwich-accident-underscores-trucks-not-fit-2330208.php>.

³ New York State Police, "State Police Stop Nearly 200 Trucks During Bridge Strike Enforcement Efforts," Hamlet Hub (Ridgefield, CT), November 20, 2020, <https://news.hamlethub.com/ryebrook/publicsafety/5386-state-police-stop-nearly-200-trucks-during-bridge-strike-enforcement-effort>.

⁴ Robert Marchant, "Police: truck hits Bridge on Greenwich Border; Cans Spill Across Parkway," Greenwich Time (Norwalk, CT), February 23, 2021, <https://www.greenwichtime.com/local/article/Police-Truck-hits-bridge-on-Greenwich-border-15973726.php>.

⁵ Michelle Williams, "Northampton's 'Truck-Eating Bridge' Strikes Again," MassLive (Springfield, MA), April 02, 2020, <https://www.masslive.com/news/2020/04/northamptons-truck-eating-bridge-strikes-again.html>;
"Tractor-Trailer Stuck Under Railroad Bridge in Northampton," Massachusetts News (Boston, MA), January 04, 2021, <https://www.news10.com/news/mass-news/tractor-trailer-stuck-under-railroad-bridge-in-northampton/>.

⁶ Alec Greaney, "Tractor Trailer Caught Under Low Bridge, Closes Road in Northborough," NBC10 Boston (Boston, MA), February 21, 2021, <https://www.nbc10.com/news/local/tractor-trailer-stuck-under-low-bridge-northborough/2308631/>.

As I suggested to you in January 2020, integrating warnings into your application would help your widely-accessible navigation tools prevent further accidents. Your application already allows users to make a choice about the kind of information that is displayed to them. Adding a feature to allow them to indicate they are operating commercial vehicles is one solution that will prevent many of these accidents and improve traffic and safety on the roadways.

I respectfully request your answers to the following questions by April 19, 2021:

1. When did you first become aware that commercial vehicle drivers use your application for navigation?
2. Why haven't you incorporated national road restrictions – like those on vehicle height, weight, or hazardous materials – into your application given the demonstrated interest?
3. What additional considerations have you made to ensure the safety of commercial vehicle drivers using your application and those sharing the road with them?

I appreciate your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Richard Blumenthal". The signature is written in a cursive style and is centered within a light gray rectangular box.

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senate