Rwanda will penalize drivers for using mobile phones only when the device is held in hand, as the government prepares to introduce a tougher, points-based traffic enforcement system, the minister of infrastructure said Monday.

Appearing before the Chamber of Deputies on Dec. 29, Infrastructure Minister Dr. Jimmy Gasore clarified that drivers using hands-free systems such as Bluetooth or mounted phones will not be punished under the new road use law currently under review.

“If the phone is mounted or connected to the car, it is not considered an offense. It is similar to talking to a passenger in the vehicle,” Gasore told lawmakers.

The clarification comes amid public concern over how phone use would be treated under a proposed points-based driving system aimed at reducing traffic accidents and improving road safety. The system targets 10 major traffic offenses, with points deducted from a driver’s record depending on the seriousness and intent of the violation.

Gasore said the offenses include ignoring traffic rules, fleeing the scene of an accident, tampering with a vehicle’s speed governor, driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, driving without a license, excessive speeding, running red lights, driving an uninsured vehicle, and holding a mobile phone while driving.

Under the proposed framework, fleeing after an accident would attract the highest penalty of six points, followed by tampering with a speed governor at five points and driving under the influence at four points. Speeding and ignoring traffic signals would carry three points, while driving without insurance and using a handheld phone would each result in a two-point deduction.

Deputy Tumukunde Hope Gasatura, Chair Foreign Affairs & Security Committee said hands-free phone use does not pose a significant safety risk when compared with holding a phone while driving.

Rwanda National Police have previously conducted public awareness campaigns warning drivers about the dangers of distracted driving, speeding and other risky behaviors. Officials say the new law is intended to strengthen enforcement and encourage more responsible driving.

Gasore said the legislation also introduces a clear appeals process. Drivers who dispute a citation issued by police will be able to appeal first to a supervising authority and, if still dissatisfied, seek redress in court.

“The law focuses on behaviors most likely to cause accidents,” Gasore said. “Using a phone in hand while driving is a serious risk, but responsible use of technology, such as hands-free systems, will not be penalized.”

Once adopted, the law is expected to mark a major step toward modernizing traffic management and improving road safety in Rwanda.