



Committee: House Energy & Commerce Commerce, Manufacturing & Trade Subcommittee
Event: [Looking Under the Hood: The State of NHTSA and Motor Vehicle Safety](#)
Date: June 26, 2025
Time: 10:00 AM
Place: 2123 Rayburn House Office Building

Member Toplines:

[*Vice Chair Russ Fulcher \(R-ID-01\)*](#): Fulcher emphasized the crucial role of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) in ensuring road safety. He highlighted the bipartisan effort to develop a motor vehicle safety title as part of broader transportation reauthorization, and underscored the automotive industry's significance to the U.S. economy. He stressed the need to modernize regulations that maintain safety while enhancing American competitiveness, particularly against China. He also called on Congress to create a strong regulatory framework for autonomous vehicles (AVs) to improve safety.

Ranking Member Jan Schakowsky (D-IL-09): Schakowsky highlighted the rising toll of highway fatalities and emphasized the need for stronger safety measures. She acknowledged the success of past legislative efforts and stressed the need for further action to address increasing death rates; she called for a focused effort to identify and implement solutions.

*Full Committee Chair Brett Guthrie (R-KY-02)*¹: Guthrie emphasized the need for bipartisan, safety-first policies to modernize vehicle regulations within surface transportation reauthorization legislation. He noted the auto industry's economic impact, highlighting thousands of jobs from manufacturers in his district. He recognized AVs as a key application of artificial intelligence (AI), with the potential to reduce traffic fatalities and improve mobility, and called for a clear congressional framework to regulate AI technologies.

[*Full Committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone \(D-NJ-06\)*](#): Pallone highlighted the nearly \$1 trillion dollars in economic costs from motor vehicle deaths, ranging from emergency services, and medical bills to legal expenses. He noted the failure of NHTSA to successfully implement rules aimed at deterring drunk driving, and the auto industry's opposition to the automatic emergency braking rule. Pallone argued that the Trump administration, through staff cuts and executive orders, has limited NHTSA's capacity to adopt new safety rules. He also criticized the administration for prioritizing AVs over safety measures.

Witness Toplines:

[*John Bozzella, President and CEO, Alliance for Automotive Innovation*](#): Bozzella emphasized the importance of a healthy and competitive domestic auto industry for American economic and

¹ Opening statements by Schakowsky and Guthrie were not available at the time of this memo's distribution.

national security. He highlighted the challenges posed by tariffs and unfair competition from government-subsidized Chinese vehicles. Bozzella called for reforming NHTSA to strengthen industry competitiveness and foster innovation, noting the agency's current lack of transparency and slow rulemaking processes. He proposed modernizing safety initiatives like the New Car Assessment Program to better inform consumers.

[David Harkey, President, Insurance Institute for Highway Safety and Highway Loss](#): Harkey raised concern over road safety, noting that the U.S. fatality rate is more than double the global average. He emphasized NHTSA's critical role in issuing safety standards, supporting consumer education and investigating defects. Harkey also noted the importance of robust data and behavioral research in shaping effective safety strategies, pointing out past successes like the "Click It or Ticket" campaign. He criticized NHTSA's lack of timely action on technologies such as anti-lock braking systems and noted that the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety has stepped in to fill gaps with its own initiatives to reduce traffic fatalities.

[Catherine Chase, President, Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety](#): Chase voiced her concern about motor vehicle tragedies caused by impaired driving, speeding, distractions, and lack of restraints. She called for a holistic approach that prioritizes safe vehicles, users, and environments, guided by data and proven safety strategies. Chase underscored the need for minimum performance standards for AVs, including emergency braking and blind spot detection and urged Congress to pass legislation that promotes AV safety.

[Jeff Farrah, CEO, Autonomous Vehicle Industry Association](#): Farrah emphasized that AV testing has rapidly expanded despite the lack of a federal policy framework. He warned of a regulatory gap leaving the U.S. vulnerable to China's efforts to dominate the AV market and urged Congress to establish a comprehensive framework covering all vehicle types. Farrah highlighted the role of public trust and education in ensuring safe AV deployment, recommending NHTSA to enforce rulemakings that develop safety standards and behavioral competency tests.

Major Takeaways:

- Members dedicated a great deal of attention to their thoughts and concerns regarding AVs and how policy may support or undermine innovation.
 - Guthrie emphasized that AVs are a key application of AI critical to promoting U.S. global leadership. He called for a national regulatory framework to prevent inconsistent state regulations.
 - Rep. **Jay Obernolte** (R-CA-23) supported a federal-state partnership on AV and AI regulation and suggested that a temporary moratorium on state-level rules may be necessary to avoid a regulatory patchwork.
 - Rep. **Bob Latta** (R-OH-05) warned that inaction on AV regulation could undermine U.S. competitiveness in the global AV race.
 - Rep. **Kevin Mullin** (D-CA-15) raised concerns about the limited safety data available on AVs, particularly regarding challenges in construction zones and the blockage of emergency responders.

- Rep. **Diana Harshbarger** (R-TN-01) questioned how drivers can be confident that advanced driver-assistance systems are functioning properly and highlighted regulatory conflicts between emissions and safety standards.
- Fulcher expressed concern about connectivity and tracking capacity challenges for AVs due to obscure road markings in rural and remote areas.
- Rep. **Lori Trahan** (D-MA-03) raised concerns about the collection of personal data – such as driver location and behavior – and emphasized the need for privacy safeguards, data minimization, and the right to data deletion. She urged Congress to require AV manufacturers to implement cybersecurity and privacy plans.
- Rep. **Marc Veasey** (D-TX-33) stressed the need for federal regulations to ensure public safety and build consumer confidence. He and Rep. **Yvette Clarke** (D-NY-09) also criticized the idea of a federal moratorium on state-level AI regulations, warning it could undermine local oversight and public safety.
- Rep. **Neal Dunn** (R-FL-02) promoted the bipartisan REPAIR Act ([H.R. 1566](#)) to protect consumer data, intellectual property, and cybersecurity in vehicle repairs, citing cooperation with companies like Tesla.
- Rep. **Debbie Dingell** (D-MI-06) stressed the need for stable, forward-looking fuel economy standards to support long-term investment and maintain the global competitiveness of the U.S. auto industry. She criticized efforts to eliminate penalties for noncompliance and acknowledged the demand for electric vehicles (EVs).
- Rep. **Darren Soto** (D-FL-09) highlighted the growing role of EVs, buses, and AVs in the future of transportation. He expressed concern that tariffs on steel, aluminum, and other trade measures could increase vehicle prices and stifle innovation.
- Reps. **Kathy Castor** (D-FL-14), Pallone, and Veasey warned that NHTSA staff cuts under the Trump administration limit the agency's ability to ensure road safety.