



Committee: Senate Commerce, Science & Transportation Committee
Event: [Hearing for Key Department of Transportation Nominees](#)
Date: July 23, 2025
Time: 10:00 AM
Place: 253 Russell Senate Office Building

Member Toplines:

[*Chair Ted Cruz \(R-TX\):*](#) Cruz highlighted the importance of innovation, safety, and regulatory modernization in shaping the future of American transportation. He framed the hearing around the need for advisors who understand emerging technologies such as autonomous vehicles (AVs), artificial intelligence (AI) logistics, and smart infrastructure, arguing that federal progress has lagged due to regulatory hostility. Cruz praised the nominees for their experience and emphasized that balanced regulation and public-private partnerships will be key to progress.

[*Ranking Member Maria Cantwell \(D-WA\):*](#) Cantwell underscored the Department of Transportation's (DOT) responsibility to maintain rigorous safety standards, safeguard consumers, and ensure effective infrastructure deployment. She voiced strong concerns about recent efforts to weaken oversight, warning against policies that would allow regulated entities to undermine federal safety inspectors, drawing parallels to the Boeing Organizational Designation Authorization failures. Cantwell also pointed to critical staffing shortages at Department agencies, arguing that rebuilding capacity is essential to expedite project approvals and uphold U.S. competitiveness in freight movement and aviation.

Witness Toplines:

[*Seval Oz, Nominee for Assistant Secretary for Research at the U.S. Department of Transportation:*](#) Oz emphasized that the U.S. faces a 'moral imperative' to accelerate the deployment of AV technologies, citing the potential to prevent up to 90 percent of traffic fatalities. Drawing on her leadership at Google and in the automotive industry, she highlighted the importance of a national framework to scale AI-enabled transportation systems and enhance safety across all modes. Oz committed to using the Office of Research and Technology to drive evidence-based innovation, support Made-in-America tech, and position the U.S. as a global leader in next-generation mobility.

[*Michael Rutherford, Nominee for Assistant Secretary of the Office of Multimodal Freight Infrastructure and Policy:*](#) Rutherford highlighted the need for a more coordinated, data-driven national freight strategy to improve efficiency, resilience, and economic competitiveness across all modes of transportation. Drawing on his leadership at CSX and experience in international logistics, he committed to updating the National Freight Strategic Plan, addressing infrastructure bottlenecks, and enhancing supply chain visibility through tools like the Freight

Logistics Optimization Works. He emphasized strong federal-state partnerships and targeted investment in critical freight corridors as essential to maintaining global competitiveness.

[Gregory Zerzan: Nominee for General Counsel of the U.S. Department of Transportation](#): Zerzan reflected on his upbringing, family values, and public service experience as the foundation for his approach to the role of General Counsel at DOT. He emphasized the importance of working collaboratively and pledged to bring humility, respect, and dedication to the position.

Major Takeaways:

Republican members called for a national AV framework but disagreed on the federal government's role, with some urging regulatory clarity to boost innovation and others warning against mandates that limit consumer choice or prioritize ideological goals.

- Cruz criticized the lack of a federal framework on AV deployment, warning that the U.S. risks falling behind countries like Germany and China. He urged DOT to focus on core safety functions and eliminate what he called "ideological" grant requirements, referencing \$80 billion spent on diversity, equity, and inclusion and environmental initiatives.
- Sen. **Bernie Moreno** (R-OH) voiced concern that government obsession with electric vehicles (EVs) and potentially AVs could lead to reduced consumer choice and dominance by big tech. He stressed that AV technology should be optional and affordable, not mandated by regulation.
- Sen. **John Curtis** (R-UT) highlighted Utah's growth and upcoming role as the 2034 Winter Olympics host as reasons to streamline permitting and environmental review. He praised Utah's investment in emerging technologies like electric aircraft.

Democratic members urged caution around deregulation, called for better grant processing, and stressed support for Tribal and consumer protections.

- Cantwell warned against lax exemptions like those previously granted to the Department of Defense for aviation safety systems. She called for robust infrastructure investments to reduce freight bottlenecks and enhance competitiveness.
- Sen. **Ben Ray Lujan** (D-NM) questioned nominee Seval Oz about whether innovation at Google came at the cost of transparency and public safety, and raised broader concerns about the administration's DOT staffing decisions.
- Sen. **Brian Schatz** (D-HI) criticized the freeze of 3,200 DOT grant awards, warning that the current review process is too slow and risks fostering favoritism. He urged DOT to presume project legality once state DOTs are involved, called for stronger Tribal consultation training, and pushed to establish the Aviation Consumer Protection Office fully.

- Sen. **Andy Kim** (D-NJ) called for finalization of the National Multimodal Freight Network and expressed strong support for continuing the Freight Logistics Optimization Works initiative to prevent future supply chain disruptions.

Members shared competing views on whether federal policy should aggressively support or restrain the transition to autonomous and electric technologies.

- Moreno opposed any regulatory push that would mandate AV or EV adoption, arguing it could lead to a future controlled by tech monopolies and limit personal freedom.
- Cantwell supported building public confidence in AVs through clear regulatory frameworks and coordination with industry, drawing comparisons to early efforts to regulate drones.
- Schatz and Kim urged nominees to commit to data transparency, interagency coordination, and advancing bipartisan transportation programs that prioritize public benefit over private control.