



Committee: House Energy & Commerce Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing & Trade

Event: [Examining Legislative Options to Strengthen Motor Vehicle Safety, Ensure Consumer Choice and Affordability, and Cement U.S. Automotive Leadership](#)

Date: January 13, 2026

Time: 2:00 PM

Place: 2175 Rayburn House Office Building

Member Toplines:

[Chair Gus Bilirakis \(R-FL-12\)](#): Bilirakis emphasized the need for a coordinated, strategic partnership among federal, state, and private-sector stakeholders to address the challenges facing emerging auto technologies.

*Full Committee Chair Brett Guthrie (R-KY-02)*¹: Guthrie highlighted that the auto industry is America's largest manufacturing base and a vital driver of jobs and economic growth. He warned that China's rapidly expanding vehicle production capability poses a competitive challenge to U.S. manufacturers, requiring immediate bipartisan action by Congress. Guthrie added that proposals to modernize the NHTSA and establish a federal framework for AVs are necessary to improve safety and reestablish U.S. global automotive leadership.

[Ranking Member Jan Schakowsky \(D-IL-09\)](#): Schakowsky emphasized that car safety remains a critical public safety issue, noting that nearly 40,000 people die on U.S. roads each year and arguing that emerging vehicle technologies should be leveraged to reduce fatalities. She added that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) must be adequately resourced to achieve stronger safety outcomes.

[Ranking Member of the Full Committee Frank Pallone \(D-NJ-06\)](#): Pallone criticized recent cuts and delays by the Trump Administration to the NHTSA that have stalled progress on mandated safety rules. He emphasized the importance of advancing legislation that ensures that safety and accountability are central in the deployment of AVs.

*Rep. Debbie Dingell (D-MI-06)*²: Dingell emphasized that shifting political strategies across different administrations have created uncertainty for the auto industry. She warned that continued delays will allow global competitors such as China to surge ahead in automated vehicle (AV) and electric vehicle (EV) innovation and deployment, noting that China overtook the U.S. as the world's leading seller of EVs for the first time last year.

¹ Opening statement was not available online at the time of this memo's distribution

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*Rep. Kevin Mullin (D-CA-15)*³: Mullin noted that AVs and advanced driver-assistance systems already operate daily in his district and have significant potential to reduce human error and improve mobility, but warned that unclear standards and insufficient oversight could undermine public trust. He stressed the importance of clear federal safety standards and transparency.

Witness Toplines:

[*Hilary Cain, Senior Vice President, Alliance for Automotive Innovation:*](#) Cain highlighted that despite major advances in vehicle safety technology, nearly 40,000 roadway deaths per year is unacceptable. She contended that further progress must not come at the expense of affordability, consumer choice, or U.S. competitiveness, and she called to modernize NHTSA through research and rulemaking directives along with the enactment of a national autonomous vehicle framework.

[*Bill Hanvey, CEO, Auto Care Association:*](#) Hanvey expressed his support for the REPAIR Act ([H.R. 1566](#)) in the safety title of Surface Transportation Reauthorization, arguing it would immediately improve vehicle safety, lower costs, and preserve consumer choice. He warned that automakers' control of repair data is forcing consumers into higher-cost dealerships and argued that the problem will worsen as vehicles become more software-driven. Hanvey welcomed efforts to strengthen NHTSA rulemaking.

[*Finch Fulton, Government Affairs Advisor, K&L Gates:*](#) Fulton stressed that AV technologies can significantly improve motor safety and efficiency as many roadway deaths are caused by speeding and impaired driving. He urged Congress to support the safe integration of these technologies, highlighting the importance of passing the draft SELF DRIVE Act ([H.R. _____](#)).

[*Michael Brooks, Executive Director, Center for Auto Safety:*](#) Brooks argued against any automotive legislation that would weaken federal safety authority or prioritize automaker interests over public safety. He emphasized that the U.S. continues to lag behind peer countries in roadway fatalities and warned against rolling back existing protections or limiting regulators' ability to respond to unproven technologies.

Major Takeaways

- Competition with China
 - Reps. **Thomas Kean Jr.** (R-NJ-07), **Debbie Dingell** (D-MI-03), **Marc Veasey** (D-TX-33), and Guthrie warned that absent a clear federal AV framework, China will set global automotive standards and outpace U.S. innovation.
 - Guthrie emphasized that AVs can reduce traffic fatalities and save lives, but argued that only a set of clear national standards will allow the U.S. to "compete to innovate" with China.
 - Dingell stressed that failure to act on AV legislation risks ceding U.S. auto leadership to China, as it rapidly scales automated and EV technologies.

- National AV Framework

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- There was broad bipartisan agreement that the system of “outdated” federal rules and state-by-state AV laws is untenable, with the SELF DRIVE Act cited as a primary vehicle to establish a single national AV safety framework.
- Kean and Guthrie argued that the development of a federal AV framework is essential to the safety of drivers and preventing China from exploiting U.S. regulatory fragmentation to gain a market advantage.
- Rep. **Lori Trahan** (D-MA-03) supported the SELF DRIVE Act’s safety-case approach, but raised concerns that manufacturers may not be required to proactively submit safety cases to federal regulators or update them after major software changes.
- Safety Oversight and NHTSA
 - Pallone criticized delayed NHTSA safety rules and a decline in investigations, arguing that weakened federal oversight directly undermines public trust and AV safety.
 - Mullin described the AV Safety Data Act ([H.R. 4376](#)) as critical to closing data gaps by requiring the reporting of miles travelled and unplanned stoppages by AVs.
 - Rep. **Jay Obernolte** (R-CA-23) cautioned against rigid mandates, suggesting that NHTSA guidance and clearer information-sharing may be more effective than prescriptive requirements, particularly as AV technology blurs federal, state, and local authority lines.
- Technical Standards
 - Rep. **Darren Soto** (D-FL-09) emphasized that the “redundancy” across cameras, radar, and LiDAR is essential to AV safety in poor weather and low visibility conditions.
 - He argued that federal AV standards at a minimum must require having multiple different sensors to ensure reliability and prevent safety failures in real-world driving conditions.
- Fire Safety and EVs
 - Bilirakis highlighted the importance of coordination between automakers and fire rescue teams to address uncontrolled EV battery fires and protect first responders.
 - Soto warned that proposed cuts to EV incentives and a 25 percent reduction in NHTSA staffing risk sidelining EVs and hybrids as their popularity and reliability increases, undermining both safety and innovation.
- Electric Door Latches
 - Rep. **Robin Kelly** (D-IL-02) focused on the dangers of electronic door latches in crashes or power loss scenarios. Kelly highlighted her recent release of the Safe Exit Act ([H.R. 6947](#)) to require the NHTSA to issue a final rule to establish performance and labeling requirements for electric doors.
- Intellectual Property
 - Members warned that insufficient intellectual property protections and weak enforcement could steer consumers toward counterfeit or poorly tested parts manufactured overseas, particularly in China.

- Kean cautioned that weakening any intellectual property protections could exacerbate the influx of counterfeit components into the U.S.
- He stressed his support for the PARTS Act ([H.R. 5221](#)), which would inhibit the resale of stolen catalytic converters and decrease the incentives for bad actors to continue committing this theft.