LOTSIXTEEN

Committee:	House Science, Space & Technology Subcommittee on Research & Technology
Event:	Accelerating Progress: U.S. Surface Transportation Research
Date:	February 11, 2026
Time:	2:00 PM
Place:	2318 Rayburn House Office Building

Executive Summary:

The House Science, Space & Technology Subcommittee on Research & Technology hearing focused on strengthening U.S. surface transportation infrastructure and innovation in the face of emerging technological and security challenges. Members from both parties agreed that federal investment in surface transportation research and autonomous vehicle (AV) technologies is critical to economic growth and public safety. Republican members emphasized protecting transportation systems and research programs from foreign adversaries, particularly China, while Democrats stressed sustaining University Transportation Center (UTC) funding and investing in next-generation mobility technologies to support domestic manufacturing.

Member Toplines:

Chair Jay Obernolte (R-CA-23): Obernolte explained that surface transportation infrastructure is essential to the U.S. economy and Congress must strengthen its research and development priorities as it prepares to reauthorize key transportation programs. He highlighted existing vulnerabilities in connected transportation systems such as GPS, traffic management networks, and vehicle-to-infrastructure communications and warned that China could exploit such weaknesses if left unchecked. Obernolte also urged the continued evaluation of AV technologies to ensure U.S. transportation systems remain advanced and safe.

Ranking Member Haley Stevens (D-MI-11): Stevens described Surface Transportation Reauthorization as an opportunity to strengthen U.S. competitiveness and protect domestic auto manufacturing, particularly in Michigan. She emphasized the urgency of investing in next-generation mobility technologies, including electric vehicles (EV) and AVs to counter the rapid rise of Chinese auto production and imports. Stevens cited her legislation, the No Chinese Cars Act (H.R.4736) as a necessary step to safeguard American auto jobs and supply chains from Chinese influence.

Full Committee Chair Brian Babin (R-TX-36): Babin highlighted the Subcommittee's role in overseeing research and technology programs within Surface Transportation Reauthorization, pointing to university-based innovations in vehicle safety and AV technologies. He also stressed the need to shield U.S. transportation infrastructure and research from foreign adversaries such as China, warning that decisions made now will shape America's mobility and competitiveness for generations.

Ranking Member of the Full Committee Zoe Lofgren (D-CA-18): Lofgren emphasized that federal investments in surface transportation directly affect Americans' daily lives and are vital to the timely shipment of goods throughout the country. She pointed to deteriorating surface transportation infrastructure and argued that sustained research is essential to make transportation systems safer and more resilient to supply chain shocks. Lofgren also criticized the Department of Transportation's (DOT) termination of several UTC grants, warning that such actions undermine research continuity and workforce development.

Witness Toplines:

Diana Furchtgott-Roth, Former Deputy Assistant Secretary for Research and Technology, U.S. Department of Transportation: Furchtgott-Roth stressed the importance of investments in vehicle automation and the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Infrastructure (ARPA-I) as key to reducing roadway fatalities and modernizing road infrastructure. She emphasized the need to protect and back up GPS systems against foreign interference and ensure government vehicles adopt such safeguards. Furchtgott-Roth also advocated requiring that batteries and charging equipment be made in the U.S. to reduce exposure to Chinese companies.

Dr. Henry Liu, Professor Civil and Environmental Engineering, Director of the Center for Connected and Automated Transportation, Mcity, University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute: Liu urged Congress to accelerate surface transportation research by prioritizing the development of a national framework for AV safety evaluation and advancing digital road infrastructure enabled with artificial intelligence (AI). He argued that without sustained federal research, the U.S. risks either premature AV deployment that undermines public trust or delayed adoption of potentially life-saving technology. Liu also recommended establishing a dedicated federal AV research program and investing in shared data and computing infrastructure.

Greg Winfree, Agency Director, Texas A&M Transportation Institute: Winfree explained that sustained federal investment in surface transportation research is critical to maintaining U.S. leadership amid rapidly accelerating technological change and growing global competition. He highlighted the importance of the UTC Programs as a force multiplier for the DOT, urging Congress to reauthorize it and to support dedicated funding for technology deployment in the next surface transportation bill. Winfree also identified priority research areas including national transportation intelligence tools, digital infrastructure modernization, and a more proactive approach to transportation safety as essential to improving system innovation and reducing driving deaths nationwide.

Major Takeaways:

Advancing Surface Transportation Research:

- Obernolte explained that promising technology pilots often fail to scale nationwide due to a lack of federal support and called on Congress to take a more hands-on-approach to move vehicle technology research from the lab to real-world deployment.
- Stevens noted that the federal government's cancellation of UTC grants undermines confidence in federal research programs.

- Rep. **Sarah McBride** (D-DE) applauded UTC grant research for providing actionable recommendations that help state and local governments make smarter, cost-effective surface transportation infrastructure decisions.

Autonomous Vehicles (AVs):

- Stevens highlighted Mcity as a critical tool for developing and testing autonomous and connected vehicle software, supporting safer AV deployment.
- Rep. **Vince Fong** (R-CA-20) advocated for a national framework to allow for the safe deployment of AVs, stressing that consistent interstate legislation and congressional action are needed to advance the technology safely.

Data and AI:

- Rep. **April McClain Delaney** (R-MD-06) explained that federal investments in integrated data standards improves interoperability across transit systems and enables the better use of emerging technologies for surface transportation.

Cybersecurity:

- Rep. **Bill Foster** (D-IL-11) raised concerns about cybersecurity for AVs, EVs, and connected infrastructure, emphasizing that existing standards from the National Institute of Standards and Technology are insufficient to protect public safety without a regulatory or enforcement body.