



Committee: Senate Commerce, Science & Transportation Subcommittee on Surface Transportation, Freight, Pipelines, and Safety on Transportation Innovation

Event: [The Need for Speed: How Technological Advances are Driving Transportation Innovation](#)

Date: June 9, 2026

Executive Summary:

On June 9, 2026 the Senate Commerce, Science & Transportation Subcommittee on Surface Transportation, Freight, Pipelines, and Safety on Transportation Innovation held a hearing on the deployment of autonomous vehicles (AV), transportation safety technologies, and the modernization of the nation's transportation system.

- Members across both parties expressed support for advancing a federal AV framework. They argued that congressional action is needed to provide regulatory certainty, improve roadway safety, and maintain U.S. competitiveness.
- Republicans supported policies to support and modernize the trucking fleet, including repealing the federal excise tax on heavy-duty trucks and overturning electric truck mandates.
- Democrats focused on the safety benefits of emerging transportation technologies while stressing the importance of maintaining human oversight as transportation systems become increasingly automated.

Member Toplines:¹

Chair Todd Young (R-IN): Young emphasized the need to eliminate outdated regulations that hinder the deployment of new transportation technologies such as AVs. He also advocated for repealing the 12 percent federal excise tax on heavy trucks to encourage the purchase of newer, safer vehicles.

Ranking Member Gary Peters (D-MI): Peters stressed the importance of passing a comprehensive federal AV framework to accelerate the deployment of connected vehicle technologies and advanced driver assistance systems. At the same time, he questioned how emerging transportation technologies can be implemented without displacing American workers or compromising national security.

Witness Toplines:

[Ian Jefferies, President and Chief Executive Officer, Association of American Railroads:](#) Jefferies described how railroads are deploying artificial intelligence and machine vision technologies to detect equipment defects and enhance safety performance. He advocated for a mode-neutral, performance-based regulatory framework that prioritizes measurable safety outcomes over prescriptive requirements.

¹ Opening statements were not available online at the time of this memo's distribution.

[Chris Spear, President and Chief Executive Officer, American Trucking Association:](#) Spear urged Congress to repeal the 12 percent federal excise tax on heavy trucks to speed the adoption of more technologically advanced vehicle fleets. He also called for a consistent national framework for AVs to avoid a patchwork of state regulations and federal support to combat cargo theft.

[Cole Scandaglia, Deputy Director, International Brotherhood of Teamsters:](#) Scandaglia argued that any federal AV framework should incorporate protections for workers affected by automation. He emphasized that automated rail inspection technologies should complement rather than replace human visual inspections. Scandaglia also cautioned against allowing Chinese companies to operate AVs in the U.S. or receive federal transportation funding due to potential national security risks.

[Laura Chace, President and Chief Executive Officer, ITS America:](#) Chase stressed that digital technologies and connected data systems should be recognized as essential components of the nation's transportation infrastructure. She warned that insufficient federal leadership and funding could lead to fragmented technology deployment nationwide and potential cybersecurity issues.

Major Takeaways:

Federal AV Framework:

- Peters stressed the need to advance a federal framework for AVs, arguing that congressional guidance is needed to provide certainty for the trucking industry and workers.
- Sen. **Cynthia Lummis** (R-WY) promoted autonomous trucking as a tool to improve highway safety and supply chain efficiency, while urging Congress to remove outdated regulatory barriers that hinder deployment.
- Sen. **Ted Cruz** (R-TX) described AVs as one of the most significant innovations facing the transportation sector and indicated support for including AV provisions in a forthcoming surface transportation reauthorization bill.
- Young emphasized that federal leadership is necessary to create scalable markets for advanced transportation technologies and strengthen U.S. competitiveness against geopolitical rivals such as China.

Transportation Safety Technologies:

- Peters highlighted his bill the Vehicle Safety Research Act ([S.1474](#)) to accelerate the research, testing, and deployment of advanced driver assistance systems and connected vehicle technologies, arguing that faster deployment will save lives.
- Sen. **Ben Ray Lujan** (D-NM) criticized delays in deploying technologies capable of preventing impaired driving crashes and argued that regulators and industry should move more aggressively to adopt proven safety innovations.

National Security:

- Young argued that U.S. economic competitiveness depends on rapidly integrating advanced transportation technologies while ensuring that transportation infrastructure is protected from cybersecurity threats.
- Sen. **Bernie Moreno** (R-OH) warned that Chinese-connected vehicles could transmit sensitive data, including location information, photographs, and videos, back to the Chinese government.
- Moreno argued that Congress should address national security risks posed by Chinese vehicle manufacturers before expanding the deployment of connected and AV technologies in the U.S.

Modernizing the Trucking Fleet:

- Moreno praised efforts to repeal the federal excise tax on heavy-duty trucks and argued the tax discourages investment in newer, safer, and more fuel-efficient vehicles.
- Moreno also defended congressional efforts to overturn electric truck mandates. He explained that the requirements were unrealistic given current market adoption rates.

Rail Safety and Automated Inspections:

- Sen. **Andy Kim** (D-NJ) questioned the limitations of automated track inspection technologies and emphasized the importance of understanding what defects still require human inspection and oversight.