

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20515

June 16, 2021

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, S.E.  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

We write today to encourage the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) to continue to support the safe deployment of autonomous vehicles (AVs) by ensuring motor vehicle standards keep pace with modern vehicle technology. Recent advances in occupant-less AVs will allow this innovative technology to begin to operate at a meaningful scale, creating well-paying jobs for American workers, accelerating the transition to electric vehicles, and improving roadway safety.

AVs are being deployed across the country and have already made a positive impact in the communities where they operate. They're being used to alleviate food insecurity, deliver critical medication to patients, and allow for contactless delivery of everyday goods. These applications are particularly useful as we continue to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, as autonomous deliveries have helped limit interactions that can spread the disease. And, small delivery AVs that do not carry humans, occupant-less vehicles, can help enhance road safety because of their smaller size and weight compared to traditional vehicles.

Additionally, as the U.S. bolsters efforts to combat climate change, additional deployment of AVs, which are typically electric vehicles, can help to reduce emissions in the transportation sector – which is the single largest emitter today.

However, a major barrier to the deployment of these vehicles is the outdated Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards, which have not kept pace with advances in technology. While the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) can provide case-by-case exemptions, it has only done so for AVs once. This is not a regulatory environment conducive to innovation.

In 2016, the first landmark guidance document on AV policy was published. Since then, career staff at NHTSA have moved forward with several technical efforts to update regulations to allow AVs, including occupant-less vehicles, to safely operate. The recently released rulemaking entitled “Occupant Protection for Automated Driving Systems” would allow occupant-less vehicles to forgo features that serve no safety purpose in a vehicle with no human occupants, such as seatbelts and airbags. While the text of the final rule was released by the DOT on January 14, it has not yet been published in the Federal Register. If finalized, this rule would address approximately half of the standards that impede the deployment of occupantless vehicles, providing regulatory certainty for manufacturers without compromising safety.

Ultimately, comprehensive, bipartisan legislation to modernize America’s approach to deploying AVs will be needed to ensure there are proper safeguards, support for workers, and certainty for U.S. companies. However, DOT has an opportunity to implement further changes to ensure AVs with innovative designs can be adopted at scale. The standards governing manual controls such as brake pedals and steering wheels must also be updated, but NHTSA has not yet proposed a rule change. We support proceeding expeditiously on rulemaking to address these remaining regulatory barriers.

Technological innovation can bring new breakthroughs that save lives, reduce emissions, and create jobs. Modernizing vehicle standards will help ensure that the U.S. continues to foster a regulatory environment that preserves its status as a global leader in AV technology. We look forward to working with you and NHTSA to accelerate domestic investment in this next-generation transportation technology. Thank you in advance for your attention to our request.

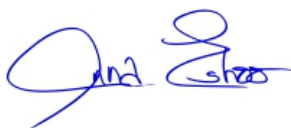
Sincerely,



Doris Matsui  
Member of Congress



Adam Kinzinger  
Member of Congress



Anna G. Eshoo  
Member of Congress



Larry Bucshon, M.D.  
Member of Congress