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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE,
AND TRANSPORTATION

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6125

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October 22, 2021

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

We write to express concern about the lack of focus by the Department of Transportation (DOT) regarding the development of federal policy that will promote the safe deployment of autonomous vehicle (AV) and automated driving system (ADS) technology in the United States.

With more than 38,000 people dying each year on our roads and 94 percent of those accidents related to human error, the time for additional automotive safety technologies and expanded testing of automated vehicles on roads is now. AVs and ADS technology present unique opportunities for innovation by advancing transportation safety, making freight transportation more efficient, and increasing mobility access nationwide. Over the last year, AVs provided medical relief and essential necessities to people and expanded transportation services to communities with limited access.


At your confirmation hearing, you said you were “enthusiastic” for America to lead the way on AVs. For America to lead, it is essential that the federal government provide regulatory certainty as industry develops these vehicles and related safety technologies. In 2020, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) released an Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on the Framework for Automated Driving System Safety, which initiated conversations about potential regulatory action. However, DOT has not made any noticeable regulatory progress or provided additional guidance since that proposal was released. Additionally, in June 2021, NHTSA withdrew its proposed pilot program, which would have facilitated the testing and development of advanced vehicle technologies and provided NHTSA the opportunity to learn from those activities with corresponding safety oversight.

We urge you to prioritize AV and ADS development and deployment to encourage American competitiveness in the global economy. DOT can most effectively encourage the development and deployment of these technologies by providing regulatory certainty that maintains safety, allows for innovation, and avoids prescriptive requirements and mandates. To those points, please respond to the following questions:

- What actions should the public expect to see from DOT regarding AV and ADS policy over the next six to 12 months, and what is the timeline for that work?
- Does DOT plan to work on regulations or guidance to comprehensively cover passenger and freight AVs and ADS?
- How will DOT ensure that any regulatory actions taken by the Department allow for innovations in AV and ADS technology and avoid prescriptive requirements or mandates?

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue to support American competitiveness and further improve road safety. We look forward to collaborating on potential solutions to resolve these challenges and facilitate the safe development, testing, and deployment of AVs and ADS in the US.

Sincerely,



Roger F. Wicker
Ranking Member



John Thune
U.S. Senator