



**ADVOCATES
FOR HIGHWAY
& AUTO SAFETY**

Oral statement of Cathy Chase, as delivered on September 13, 2023, before the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Highways and Transit during the hearing “The Future of Automated Commercial Motor Vehicles: Impacts on Society, the Supply Chain, and U.S. Economic Leadership.”

Good morning, Chair Crawford, Ranking Member Norton, Chair Graves, Ranking Member Larsen and Subcommittee Members. I’m Cathy Chase, president of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety. Advocates is a national coalition of leading property-casualty insurance companies and agents, and public health, consumer, law enforcement and safety groups working together since 1989 to prevent crashes, save lives and reduce economic costs.

Thank you for holding today’s hearing at a critical time when motor vehicle crash fatalities are at historic highs. Nearly 43,000 people were killed and 2.5 million more were injured in 2021. Fatal truck crashes also have been on the rise, increasing by 71 percent since 2009.

These are not just statistics. They are family members and friends who have needlessly died or been seriously injured in a preventable truck crash. Many are joining us today in person or virtually. I want to thank them for their strength and determination to advance commonsense and cost-effective solutions to prevent truck crashes.

Also, I want to acknowledge National Truck Driver Appreciation Week and convey my gratitude for their essential contributions to our everyday lives. Truck driving is one of the most dangerous jobs in our country, and drivers are at risk every time they get behind the wheel.

Automated, or driverless, technology, including cars, trucks, and buses, is being offered as a solution to reduce our Nation’s mounting death and injury toll. However, this remedy cannot be realized without rigorous testing, effective regulations setting minimum performance standards, comprehensive data collection, full transparency to inform regulators and the public, diligent government oversight, and AV-industry accountability to immediately identify problems and take corrective actions.

AV safety performance and reliability are largely unknown, unresolved, and frequently unpredictable. What we do know is that AV operations in San Francisco have caused numerous dangerous situations. City officials, emergency responders, and local transportation leaders have raised serious safety concerns and strongly opposed the recent program expansion.

The safety mishaps are substantial, and the consequences are alarming. A recent crash involving an AV and a fire truck and other incidents resulted in the state’s regulatory agency cutting certain AV operations by 50 percent. While AVs for passengers and AV trucks are not the same, there are similarities and lessons to be learned from the on-going San Francisco program. The numerous problems must not be replicated, or magnified with trucks or transit vehicles which are significantly larger and heavier, more complex to operate, and can have devastating outcomes in crashes.

It's really no surprise that the public has serious concerns about AVs. Advocates commissioned a national public opinion poll earlier this year. It revealed that nearly 9 in 10 people are concerned about sharing the roads with driverless trucks. When asked if their concerns about driverless vehicles would be addressed if required to meet minimum government standards, 64% responded yes.

In 2020, Advocates, together with key stakeholders, developed the AV Tenets to guide the development of policies and laws concerning the introduction and operation of AVs. More than 65 groups representing truck drivers, unions, disability rights, emergency responders, law enforcement, bicyclists, pedestrians, smart growth, and others support the Tenets. They offer a blueprint to achieve essential goals:

- to prioritize the safety of all road users;
- to guarantee accessibility and equity for all individuals including those with disabilities;
- to preserve consumer and worker rights; and,
- to ensure local control and sustainable transportation.

Furthermore, the safe development and deployment of driverless trucks requires:

- Issuing federal performance standards and other necessary regulations;
- Reporting crashes involving fatalities, injuries and property damage;
- Rejecting mass exemptions from existing federal safety standards;
- Collecting data and making it publicly available;
- Requiring driverless trucks to always have an operator with a valid CDL in the vehicle for the foreseeable future and requiring other necessary endorsements; and,
- Attaining additional operating authority for motor carriers operating driverless trucks.

As AV trucks progress, many proven safety solutions that can dramatically reduce truck crash deaths and injuries now are currently available and need to be implemented. For example, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law included a mandate to DOT to require automatic emergency braking (AEB) for trucks within two years. Studies show that these systems significantly reduce or mitigate crashes caused by many factors including drunk, drugged, distracted and drowsy driving. Moreover, they are "building blocks" for the possibility of future AV cars and trucks.

In closing, advancing safety, achieving technological innovation, and attaining economic leadership can and must be compatible goals, and not trade-offs. Thank you.