



**Statement for the Record
Greg Regan, President
Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO**

Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee

“Hit the Road, Mac: The Future of Self-Driving Cars”

February 4, 2026

On behalf of our affiliated unions representing hundreds of thousands of workers who build, operate, and maintain our nation’s transportation networks, the Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO (TTD) offers this statement for the record as part of the Senate Commerce Committee’s February 4 hearing entitled “Hit the Road, Mac: The Future of Self-Driving Cars.”

TTD, through its affiliated unions, collectively represents hundreds of thousands of workers operating, maintaining, and manufacturing transit vehicles; building transportation infrastructure including bridges and highways, and responding to fire emergencies. The safety of these workers depends on predictable, compliant vehicle behavior in dynamic, often hazardous conditions. The current national regulatory environment purportedly overseeing the deployment of autonomous vehicles raises serious safety concerns for our members. TTD implores Congress to take action on autonomous vehicles: pass a proactive, worker-centered regulatory framework with standards that NHTSA, FMCSA, and FTA are empowered and appropriately resourced to enforce, and that will require steadfast commitment to safety and to the workers.

Congress should ensure that new technology onboard public transportation equipment meets existing safety and operational standards – Minimum federal safety standards are urgently needed

The current patchwork of state and local legislation of automated vehicles, in the vacuum that the federal government’s abdication of responsibility has left, has allowed for numerous alarming and dangerous incidents to take place on our public roads and impact innocent road users, pedestrians, and transportation workers:

- Just a couple of weeks ago, the [National Transportation Safety Board opened an investigation into Waymo](#) after its vehicles were found to have illegally passed stopped school buses on more than 20 occasions, potentially endangering young children as they travel to and from school.
- Last month, a [Waymo vehicle failed to recognize road flares](#) and drove a passenger into an active fire scene in Los Angeles.
- In 2023, a [driverless GM Cruise car plowed into an active firefighting scene](#) in San Francisco last month, forcing firefighters to smash its front window in order to stop the vehicle.

- Within the first month of deployment of its robotaxi service in Austin, Texas last summer, [Tesla reported three collisions, including one injury](#), to NHTSA

The status quo allows for American AV companies to continue to expand to new service areas, and for foreign AV companies to use our citizens and our infrastructure as guinea pigs to train their technologies as well—all without demonstrating to the federal government that these vehicles meet reasonable minimum safety standards.

We believe Congress has a responsibility to establish well-researched, common-sense minimum safety standards, practically enforceable by DOT and its modal administrations. Moreover, Congress should ensure that any vehicle providing public transportation service on our public roads meets or exceeds the existing safety and operational standards that public transportation providers are held to. Each should be well established *before* deployment on our streets.

Humans must retain oversight and the ability to intervene in a crisis - qualified, certified operators must remain present on every vehicle used for public transportation

Like all technologies currently operated in our society, AVs will at some point malfunction. Although the most advanced versions of these vehicles are designed to take complete responsibility for the entire driving task, from stop to start, it is impossible to predict every possible emergency scenario and program the vehicles accordingly to protect the safety of passengers. Whether necessitated by an onboard human emergency, such as an act of violence or a medical crisis, or by the malfunction of the technology, humans must always retain the ability to intervene to get to safety.

This is especially true in the case of public transit. In 2022, Carnegie Mellon University's Traffic21 transportation research institute issued a policy brief highlighting several critical findings regarding the unique challenges of operating AVs in public transit environments and emphasized the indispensable role of human operators. These challenges and the necessity for human oversight highlight significant limitations that prevent AVs from currently delivering their purported benefits effectively.

Public transit operates within highly complex and dynamic environments. These settings are often characterized by the presence of pedestrians, cyclists, and various unpredictable elements such as roadwork and traffic signals manually operated by law enforcement. Autonomous systems often struggle to interpret these varied and subtle human cues, leading to operational inefficiencies and potential safety hazards. The ability of human operators to navigate and adapt to these complex urban scenarios is indispensable, as they provide the necessary judgment and flexibility that current AV technologies lack.

We believe that commercial operators will always be necessary on autonomous vehicles used in public transit, and that a strong federal safety framework on AVs will address their continued presence and their appropriate training to oversee this technology.

If Congress provides funds for the purchase of automated public transportation vehicles, recipients should be required to submit workforce development plans

For all the benefits promised by the AV industry, we too often overlook the serious impacts AVs will have on workers, equity, and other important factors if this technology is not properly regulated by the federal government. As it considers any AV legislation, Congress has a responsibility to take full stock of its potential negative impacts and to craft policy solutions that ensures the transportation workforce has the skills they need to manage technological change in this industry and has a central voice in the shape of that technological change – for their own safety and welfare, and for the safety of transit passengers as well.

It is one, quite necessary, thing for Congress to provide a legal and safety framework for the deployment of autonomous vehicle technology in public transportation. It is quite another for Congress to *subsidize it* with traditional federal transportation dollars. To the extent that federal transportation funds are made available for autonomous vehicles, we call on Congress to require workforce development plans, modeled after those required for low/no emission vehicle grants under 49 U.S.C. § 5339(c)(3)(D)(vi).

This Congress, TTD is also working to ensure that any surface transportation reauthorization legislation establishes a dedicated national center focused on workforce development. This resource will ensure that public transportation agencies across urban, suburban, tribal, and rural communities have the tools, training, and support needed to recruit, retain, and train skilled workers—especially as we navigate the evolving AV technological landscape. TTD calls on Congress to formally establish the Transit Workforce Center (TWC) in federal law, ensuring it is sufficiently resourced to address the frontline workforce development needs of the public transportation sector.

To be clear, TTD firmly believes that a federal framework is necessary to meet the workforce, safety, and technological challenges presented by automated vehicles. The current piecemeal landscape is simply untenable. We strongly urge all members of this committee to work together on a bipartisan basis, in close consultation with all stakeholders—not just the voices of industry, to craft a product that protects the traveling public, maintains good jobs, and treats self-driving technology with the seriousness it warrants.