Opening Statement of the Honorable Robert E. Latta
Subcommittee on Digital Commerce and Consumer Protection
"Self-Driving Vehicles: Road to Deployment"
February 14, 2017

Good morning and welcome to the first hearing of the 115th Congress for the Digital Commerce and Consumer Protection Subcommittee. It is a pleasure to be here with you today. Before we get started, I want to thank Chairman Burgess and Vice Chairman Lance for all the good work they did last Congress. I also want to recognize the new Vice Chairman of this Subcommittee, Gregg Harper. I look forward to working together to advance an innovation agenda that creates jobs and puts consumers first. I also want to recognize Ranking Member Schakowsky. I look forward to working in a bipartisan fashion to grow the economy and protect consumers. Finally, as Chairman, I look forward to working with all members of this Subcommittee to continue exploring areas in the emerging digital economy that are creating new opportunities for economic growth, job creation, and consumer empowerment in America.

I recently had the opportunity to visit the Auto Show here in Washington, DC. The showroom floors were filled with vehicles equipped with innovative features and newly-designed systems that promise to enhance the safety, mobility, and convenience of our driving experiences. I was greatly impressed with the creativity and ingenuity of the auto industry to build vehicles that we could only dream about a short time ago. The technology advancements in this sector are nothing short of amazing.

Today, this Subcommittee will continue its focus on self-driving vehicles and their potential to completely transform our transportation system. We will hear about what testing is happening, what testing needs to happen, and what is the timeframe to deployment.

In 2015, there were over 35,000 lives tragically lost on our nation's roadways. Over 1,000 of those fatalities were in my home state of Ohio. Based on early estimates, traffic fatalities in 2016 are likely even higher. Unfortunately, we also know that human error accounts for over 90 percent of all traffic accidents. These are startling statistics; however, the emergence of automated vehicle technology and growing investments into fully self-driving vehicles promises to significantly reduce lives lost on our roads by decreasing traffic accidents and making roadways safer for all users.

As the auto industry works to make self-driving vehicles a reality, adequately testing these vehicles will be critical to refining their systems for commercial deployment and gaining consumer confidence that they are safe. Today, conventional vehicles undergo a range of tests in laboratories, on proving grounds, and on public roads before they are sold to consumers. In each of these settings, vehicle engineers and professional test-drivers go through detailed assessments and inspections of vehicles to ensure compliance with crashworthiness and crash avoidance standards, and to verify a vehicle's overall structural integrity. Cars are put through thousands – and sometimes hundreds of thousands – of miles of testing to ensure that once the vehicle is on a dealer's lot, it is safe for consumers and their families.

Unlike conventional vehicles, fully self-driving vehicles are intended to operate without the input or control of a human driver. No longer will manufacturers be able to rely on drivers to take corrective action in the event of an unexpected system failure or any unplanned roadway activity. Flexible and unregimented testing will be essential to certifying the safety and reliability of the technology powering self-driving vehicles.

As we discuss the testing of self-driving vehicles today and steps to commercial deployment, I look forward to learning from witnesses about how automakers and other entities are testing these technologies

and plans for future deployment. I also look forward to hearing about how the existing testing environment can be improved to facilitate the innovation and development of potentially life-saving automated vehicle technology in this country. Ohio's Transportation Research Center recently announced a significant investment into its Smart Mobility Advanced Research and Test Center in East Liberty, Ohio to allow for the testing of self-driving vehicles across thousands of acres of road courses. We need to understand how to ensure more states take positive steps to move testing forward and to ensure that testing doesn't become a roadblock to innovation.

Robust vehicle testing is essential to the successful and safe deployment of self-driving vehicles. Testing will not only provide automakers and other entities with the data they need to make these vehicles as safe as possible, but it will help build consumer confidence in this technology, which is central to realizing the future benefits of self-driving vehicles.

I thank the witnesses for taking the time to inform us and I look forward to a thoughtful and engaging discussion.