

Opening Statement of the Honorable Robert E. Latta
Subcommittee on Digital Commerce and Consumer Protection
“Self-Driving Vehicle Legislation”
June 27, 2017

Good morning and welcome to the Digital Commerce and Consumer Protection subcommittee hearing on self-driving vehicle legislation. Driving is an integral part of American life. When you think about who drives, you realize it is pretty much everyone. Urban and rural, young and old, and everyone and everywhere in between.

Tragically, however, traffic fatalities are on the rise. Last year there were over 40,000 fatalities and more than 2 million injuries on our nations highways. Our goal today is to enact the right policies to encourage self-driving technologies that can drastically reduce those numbers. We have a real opportunity to address this problem.

One of the most important pieces is to define the right roles for the federal, state and local governments. The need for this framework was laid out by the Obama administration just last year. From the front bumper to the back bumper – whether it’s a pick-up truck or a car or a van, how the vehicle works and is designed should be the province of the federal government as has been the case for more than 50 years.

The states and localities have an equally important role to play in determining insurance requirements, titling cars, requiring registration and setting the rules of the road. They get to enact and enforce traffic laws and regulations as well. States will also still be able to offer incentives to entities that are early actors in this field if they want to encourage testing in their state.

We simply cannot have cars that stop at state lines. Just last week we celebrated the 61st anniversary of President Eisenhower’s interstate highway system connecting families and people across the country.

We also want to maintain leadership in the United States. Testing is happening in Europe, Australia, Japan and China. Remaining at the forefront of this innovation ensures that we do not delay safety advancements, while also having the opportunity to grow jobs and investment. Over the last year, we have seen 80 state bills introduced in legislatures across the country. We want to be sure that a confusing patchwork does not emerge that would hurt innovation and ultimately would be bad for the consumer.

Earlier this Congress, we held a hearing on Smart Communities and had the opportunity to hear from many different communities about the new technologies they are evaluating to bring new benefits into their areas. In my home state of Ohio, the city of Columbus won the Department of Transportation's Smart City Challenge last year and is already leveraging new technology to gather information to improve services for the community. Technology to improve everything from safety to sanitation to the environment is going through a period of innovation and communities are looking for wise investments to improve the lives of their citizens.

This innovation will be a focus of the Committee for years to come, especially self-driving vehicles. We are at the early stages and as the technology advances so will the need for us to continue our oversight. This first step is to set the broad outlines to bring better safety and mobility to everyone. We want the government to work actively with industry. It is important that we have these discussions in the early stages of innovation so that we do not limit the potential benefits.

Our staff have had constructive conversations with the Department of Transportation. They understand that the public will need to know an active watchdog is overlooking the industry. As the Administration continues to nominate candidates to join the Department, I look forward to working together to advance these important goals.

Finally, I have always had an open door policy and I know we cannot get this right without real world stakeholder input. We will move forward under regular order, with multiple opportunities to improve upon the staff drafts. We will meet with anyone, and we are participating in bipartisan meetings.

Pick-ups, cars, and vans are integral to the American way of life. When you revolutionize something so important to everyday life you can greatly improve everyday life. This isn't the government saying you have to get in a self-driving car. This is government making sure that industry can innovate in response to our changing lives. I'm ready to work with my colleagues to bring the safety, investment, and many other benefits to the American people in Ohio and everywhere.