COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE SPACE AND TECHNOLOGY

Opening Statement of Chairman Brian Babin

Research and Technology Subcommittee Hearing
Accelerating Progress: U.S. Surface Transportation Research
February 11, 2026

Good afternoon. Thank you, Chairman Obernolte, for convening today's hearing. I also thank our witnesses for joining us to discuss the research and development issues shaping surface transportation across the United States.

Transportation is the circulatory system of the American economy. Industry and commerce depend on it, and we must do everything we can to keep that system strong. When the flow of transportation weakens, roadblocks can prevent America from moving forward.

Research and development (R&D) in surface transportation is especially important. From trucks on our highways that support commerce to safety innovations that protect families on our roadways, these systems affect Americans every single day.

Surface transportation R&D also plays a vital role in safety. Research into crash-avoidance systems, better road materials, and vehicle-to-vehicle communication can save lives. Every mile we travel can be safer than the last if we invest in smarter vehicles and infrastructure. As transportation technologies evolve, we also need a workforce prepared to build and maintain them—another area where American research leadership is critical. Our universities are central to these efforts.

This Subcommittee oversees the research and technology titles within the surface transportation reauthorizations. These bills enable groundbreaking work at institutions across the country, including the Texas A&M Transportation Institute (TTI) in my home state. Director Winfree, I am eager to learn more about TTI's work on vehicle safety, advanced sensor technologies, and automated vehicles.

I am also interested in hearing from our witnesses about innovation in the private sector, as American companies continue developing their own autonomous vehicle technologies. Self-driving cars may well be a defining technology of the future. It is remarkable how advances in artificial intelligence are converging with transportation. Understanding these applications across both academia and industry is key to ensuring the U.S. leads in surface transportation innovation.

At the same time, Congress must examine the full scope of the U.S. research portfolio to ensure America remains at the forefront.

We must also ensure that our transportation infrastructure and research enterprise are not vulnerable to interference from foreign adversaries like the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Whether through exploiting weaknesses in GPS networks, targeting connected vehicle software, or racing ahead in next-generation technologies that could transform global markets, these risks are real and demand our attention.

From highways to railways, surface transportation in the United States is at a crossroads, and the decisions we make today will define mobility for generations. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about the current state of research in this field. It is certainly an exciting time for innovation in surface transportation.

Thank you, and I yield back the balance of my time.