

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 10, 2020

The Honorable Elaine Chao  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Chao:

In light of the recent crisis facing the aviation industry and the parallels to increasing automation in the automotive industry—both of which are regulated by the Department of Transportation—we remain opposed to new autonomous vehicle regulations and legislation that do not include strong safety standards.

As transportation becomes more automated—as with Boeing’s 737 MAX Maneuvering Characteristics Augmentation System that was responsible for two fatal plane crashes—mandatory safety standards and oversight must keep up. The recommendations from the National Transportation Safety Board’s recent report about the March 2018 automated vehicle fatality in Arizona should be heeded quickly: the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration must require mandatory, consistent safety assessments and establish a process for the ongoing evaluation of testing on public roads.


Moreover, as the leader of the agency that regulates both aviation and automotive transportation, we hope your position on autonomous vehicles will be informed by the failures of Boeing. A clear lesson from the 737 MAX crashes is that new technologies cannot be rushed to market before rigorous oversight is conducted and comprehensive safety rules are enacted.

We watched with interest as you recently unveiled the Trump Administration’s updated principles regarding autonomous vehicles, and we appreciate your continued attention to this emerging technology. However, we are concerned that the Transportation Department’s latest set of guidelines do not contain any legally binding safety standards and requirements. We urge you to ensure that Department of Transportation safety regulators exercise the strongest

oversight possible and promulgate meaningful rules, including protections for cybersecurity and consumer privacy, to ensure the safety of the public as these vehicles transform transportation and land use planning in our communities.

We look forward to your response and to further discussions on this important topic.

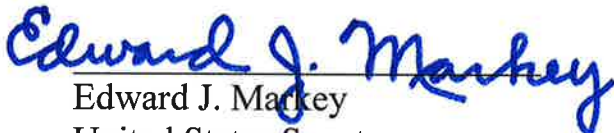
Sincerely,

  
Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator


  
Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

  
Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

  
Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

  
Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

  
Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator

  
Tom Udall  
United States Senator