

Senate Appropriators Send Letter to Government Accountability Office on Automated Vehicles; Lawmakers Aim to Vote on FAA Reauthorization Before August Recess

Article By:

Natasha Eckard Hammond

Legislative Activity

Senate Appropriators Send Letter to Government Accountability Office on Automated Vehicles

On Wednesday, April 26, Sens. Susan Collins (R-ME) and Jack Reed (D-RI), the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development, sent a letter to the Government Accountability Office regarding the impacts of automated vehicle (AV) technologies on the commercial trucking industry.

In the letter, the Senators note the potential for AVs to eliminate the 94 percent of traffic accidents caused by human error, but express concern regarding the potential impact of AV deployment on the transportation workforce. The Senators request GAO conduct a study answering the following:

- How quickly AVs may replace the current fleet of commercial vehicles used to transport goods;
- To what extent AVs will affect employment in the commercial driving industry;
- What information is known about differences in the skills and training required for commercial vehicle operators using existing Commercial Driver's Licenses (CDLs) to operate legacy vehicles in comparison to AVs; and
- How federally-funded employment and training programs are preparing to assist professional drivers with CDLs who might be negatively impacted by AVs.

Lawmakers Aim to Vote on FAA Reauthorization Before August Recess

Last week, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman Bill Shuster (R-PA) reportedly expressed his intent to craft a long-term Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

reauthorization bill before August recess.

According to Politico, the Committee's Deputy Counsel this week stated that some consumer protections, following the recently publicized forceful removal of an airline passenger, could be incorporated into FAA reauthorization.

She stated Chairman Shuster still intends to move forward with Air Traffic Control (ATC) privatization. Chairman Shuster also announced this week that several members of the Committee will travel to Canada in May to examine the country's use of a private ATC system.

The current FAA authorization expires in 153 days.

President Trump's Tax Proposal to Exclude Infrastructure

On Wednesday, April 26, the White House released a brief summary of the administration's proposal to reform the U.S. tax code. After much speculation that the administration's comprehensive tax reform proposal could be packaged with a large-scale infrastructure bill, the released summary did not contain any explicit references to infrastructure.

Several Republican Members of Congress, including Sen. John Thune (R-SD) and Chairman Shuster, acknowledged that they did not anticipate the proposal would include specifics regarding infrastructure. Some Democrats, however, including Rep. John Delaney (D-MD), argued that the administration's exclusion of infrastructure was a sign the administration is "not serious" about robust infrastructure spending.

Department of Transportation to Award Clean-Energy Transit Bus Projects

The U.S. Department of Transportation's (DOT) Federal Transit Administration (FTA) on Thursday announced the availability of \$55 million in grant funding for advanced, American-made bus technologies. The awards, which will be made through FTA's Low or No Emission (Low-No) Bus Program, can be used for the purchase or lease low-emission vehicles and related equipment, facilities, land acquisition, and technologies.

According to FTA, only \$31.5 million was made available under the Continuing Resolution (CR) that funded the government through April 28, 2017.

All state, local, and tribal agencies are eligible to receive awards, and applicants must submit a proposal by June 26, 2017. Awards are expected to be made within 75 days of the application deadline, and no later than September 30, 2017.

This Week's Hearings:

- On Saturday, May 6, the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee has scheduled a field hearing titled "Growing Jobs and Economic Opportunity: Perspectives on the 2018 Farm Bill from Michigan." The witnesses will be announced.
- On Wednesday, May 3, the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Energy has scheduled a hearing titled "Legislation Addressing Pipeline and Hydropower Infrastructure Modernization." The witnesses will be announced.

-
- On Tuesday, May 2, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee has scheduled a hearing titled “Oversight of U.S. Airline Customer Service.” The witnesses will be:
 - Oscar Munoz, Chief Executive Officer, United Airlines; accompanied by Mr. Scott Kirby, President, United Airlines;
 - Kerry Philipovitch, Senior Vice President of Customer Experience, American Airlines;
 - Joseph Sprague, Senior Vice President of External Relations, Alaska Airlines;
 - Bob Jordan, Executive Vice President and Chief Commercial Officer, Southwest Airlines; and
 - William J. McGee, Aviation Consultant, Consumers Union.
 - On Wednesday, May 3, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation has scheduled a hearing titled “Maritime Transportation Regulatory Issues.” The witnesses will be:
 - Rear Admiral Paul F. Thomas, Assistant Commandant for Prevention Policy, United States Coast Guard;
 - The Honorable Michael A. Khouri, Acting Chairman, Federal Maritime Commission;
 - Todd Schauer, President, American Salvage Association;
 - Steven Candito, Board Member, Former President and Chief Executive Officer, National Response Corporation;
 - Nicholas Nedeau, Chief Executive Officer, Rapid Ocean Response Corporation;
 - Norman “Buddy” Custard, President and Chief Executive Officer, Alaska Maritime Prevention and Response Network;
 - Thomas Allegretti, President and Chief Executive Officer, American Waterways Operators;
 - Peter Ford, Chief Strategy Officer, Ports America; and
 - John Butler, President and Chief Executive Officer, World Shipping Council.
 - On Wednesday, May 3, the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee has scheduled a hearing titled “Infrastructure Project Streamlining and Efficiency: Achieving Faster, Better, and Cheaper Results.” The witnesses will be announced.
 - On Wednesday, May 3, the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee has scheduled a hearing titled “Investing in America’s Broadband Infrastructure: Exploring Ways to Reduce Barriers to Deployment.” The witnesses will be:
 - Patricia Cooper, Vice President of Satellite Government Affairs, SpaceX;

- Larry Downes, Project Director, Georgetown Center for Business and Public Policy;
 - Brian Hendricks, Head of Technology Policy & Public Affairs for the Americas Region, Nokia Corporation; and
 - The Honorable Jeff Weninger, State Representative, Arizona House of Representatives.
- On Thursday, May 4, the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Subcommittee on Aviation Operations, Safety, and Security has scheduled a hearing titled “Questions, Answers, and Perspectives on the Current State of Airline Travel.” The witnesses will be announced.
 - On Thursday, May 4, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee has scheduled a hearing titled “Examining the threat posed by electromagnetic pulse and policy options to protect energy infrastructure and to improve capabilities for adequate system restoration.” The witnesses will be announced.

© Copyright 2025 Squire Patton Boggs (US) LLP

National Law Review, Volume VII, Number 121

Source URL: <https://natlawreview.com/article/senate-appropriators-send-letter-to-government-accountability-office-automated>