

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND
TRANSPORTATION**

Full Committee
Nominations Hearing
Wednesday, July 16, 2025, at 10:00 A.M.

DEMOCRATIC QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD

Mr. Jonathan Morrison

COVER PAGE

SENATOR MARIA CANTWELL (D-WA)

Federal Workforce Staffing Cuts

In May, the DOT paused its planned reductions in force due to ongoing litigation. On July 8, the Supreme Court allowed the Administration to move forward with widespread firings. There is now uncertainty about what actions DOT plans to take. Meanwhile, 27.8 percent of National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) employees have already left the agency through the deferred resignation program.

Question 1: Yes or No: Do you oppose a reduction-in-force at NHTSA, particularly when the agency has already lost over 27 percent of its workforce?

Answer:

Question 2: Are you concerned that widespread departures undermine NHTSA's ability to ensure public safety and pursue investigations?

Answer:

Stalled Safety Standards

Nearly 40,000 people die in traffic accidents every year, including 731 people who died in Washington State last year. The most common causes of traffic accidents are impaired and distracted driving, and speeding. NHTSA is responsible for setting and enforcing vehicle safety standards.

During your previous time at DOT, the agency did not issue a single new federal motor safety standard. Currently, there are 19 outstanding congressionally mandated vehicle safety requirements the agency has not completed. This includes automatic emergency braking for trucks, which could prevent 19,000 crashes annually, and lane keep assist, which could reduce crashes by 24 percent.

Question 1: What Congressionally mandated federal motor vehicle safety requirement rulemakings will you prioritize to decrease the number of fatal accidents on our roads, if confirmed?

Answer:

Question 2: If confirmed, will you commit to completing congressionally mandated vehicle safety rulemakings in a timely manner?

Answer:

Autonomous Vehicle Safety and AI Moratorium

Mr. Morrison, some of my colleagues have proposed prohibiting state and local governments from regulating AI. This would include prohibiting states from imposing safety and reporting requirements on autonomous vehicles.

Question 1: Does DOT have any requirements to ensure the safe operation of autonomous vehicles?

Answer:

Question 2: If the federal government does not have any safety requirements, does it make sense to prohibit states from ensuring autonomous vehicles are safe to operate on public roads?

Answer:

Safe Systems Approach for Roadway Safety

Roadway fatality rates in the United States are 15 percent higher than they were a decade ago. Clearly, we need to fix the safety culture on our roads. Currently, three federal agencies work with three different agencies in each state to address their own aspects of roadway safety, often without any coordination.

We have learned from other industries, including the aviation industry, that looking at safety holistically and creating redundancy is essential to preventing mistakes that could lead to fatal accidents.

Question 1: Yes or No: Do you agree that a safe system approach is the best way to reduce roadway fatalities?

Answer:

Question 2: How do you believe NHTSA can work with other modal administrations at the DOT to address safety holistically?

Answer:

Question 3: Yes or No: Do you support state and local efforts to implement comprehensive safety plans also known as “vision zero plans?”

Answer:

Suppressing Safety Data

Last year I sent a letter to DOT requesting documents related to allegations NHTSA suppressed safety data that showed side underride guards on truck trailers were cost beneficial. You were NHTSA’s Chief Counsel at the time.

Question 1: While serving as NHTSA’s Chief Counsel, did you allow any industry group to view, edit, or provide comment on a cost-benefit analysis or proposed research compiled by DOT’s Volpe Center related to side underride guards?

Answer:

Question 2: Did you participate in a January 2020 meeting of DOT, NHTSA, and FMCSA officials related to the Volpe Center and side underride guards? If not, did any NHTSA attorneys in your office participate?

Answer:

Question 3: Did you participate in any meetings with members of the American Trucking Association related to the Volpe Center and side underride guards? If so, provide the dates, participants, and purpose of each meeting.

Answer:

Question 4: Do you think it's appropriate to allow industry groups to have special access to pre-decisional government reports that have a direct financial impact on them?

Answer:

Question 5: If confirmed, do you commit to full transparency at NHTSA regarding meetings with industry lobbyists on issues related to public safety?

Answer:

Apple

Mr. Morrison, after working at NHTSA during the first Trump Administration, you worked in the Special Projects Group at Apple for the past four years. According to reports, during your tenure at Apple, the company spent billions of dollars developing a self-driving car, named "Project Titan." Little information is known about Project Titan, although some reports indicate Apple largely ended this effort last year.

Question 1: Mr. Morrison, please describe in detail your work on Project Titan or any other self-driving car project at Apple.

Answer:

Question 2: I understand you informed my staff during your interview on May 28, 2025, that you would not disclose the specifics of your work at Apple due to multiple non-disclosure agreements (NDAs). Is that still your position today?

Answer:

Question 3: Have you asked Apple to release you from these NDAs?

Answer:

Question 4: If a Member of this Committee directed you to ask Apple to release you from your NDAs, would you do so? If no, explain why not.

Answer:

Question 5: Do you believe it is appropriate to conceal the work you did for a private company when it is directly relevant to the position for which you have been nominated?

Answer:

SENATOR ED MARKEY (D-MA)

Driver Automation

Almost every manufacturer of driver automation systems and partial driver automation systems restrict their systems only to the roads and driving conditions the systems are designed for. Manufacturers do this using a technology known as “geofencing.” Tesla is an industry exception, allowing its Autopilot and Full-Self drive features to be enabled on any road and in any driving condition. During your hearing, you said regulation is appropriate when “a technology is fully understood and after an industry consensus has already been reached.” Geofencing driving automation systems appears to meet both these criteria given its widespread adoption by industry with the exception of Tesla.

Question 1: Do you agree that NHTSA should require all driving automation systems, including partial driving automation systems like Autopilot, to be constrained to the specific roads and conditions they are designed for?

Answer:

Truck Underrides

Q: During your hearing, you told Senator Lujan that you were not familiar with the truck underride side guard rulemaking. However, files released under the Freedom of Information Act show you were the direct recipient of emails regarding the publication of an FMCSA report on this topic. Records also show your direct reports were heavily involved in the report’s revision and publication. The report itself was highly controversial due to investigative reporting at ProPublica.

Question 1: Now that you have had the chance to refamiliarize yourself with the issue, can you commit to ensuring the lives of my constituents – Minh-Thi Nguyen and Sidney Olson -- and all vulnerable road users are included in any cost-benefit analysis NHTSA conducts while reviewing this rule?

Answer:

Distracted Driving

Research suggests distracted driving may be implicated in as many as 30% of all crashes. The *Bipartisan Infrastructure Law* required NHTSA to conduct research on distracted driving and, if appropriate, propose rulemaking to prevent distracted driving. The research was mandated to be conducted within three years of enactment and is now long overdue.

Question 1: Can you commit to expeditiously completing this research and undertaking a rulemaking to mitigate distracted driving?

Answer:

Seatback Safety

For decades, front seats in vehicles have endangered back seat riders' lives when they collapse and become projectiles during rear-end collisions. The *Bipartisan Infrastructure Law* mandated NHTSA propose rulemaking to update the standards for seat back safety and protect back seat riders, many of whom are children. NHTSA announced a proposed rule in July 2024.

Question 1: Do you commit to expeditiously finalizing this long overdue rule and protecting the lives of children in back seats?

Answer:

Staffing Cuts

According to recent reporting by Politico, 28 percent of NHTSA's employees took the Delayed Resignation Program offer.

Question 1: At an agency whose chief mission is safety, do you support these drastic cuts to NHTSA workforce?

Answer:

Question 2: What actions will you take to ensure NHTSA has the staff it needs to deliver on its safety mission?

Answer:

CAFE Standards

The reconciliation bill zeroed out penalties for automakers who violate the Corporate Average Fuel Economy standards – unless the Department of Transportation explicitly notifies them of noncompliance.

Question 1: Will you commit to publishing a public list of violators, including who has received official noncompliance notices from the Department of Transportation?

Answer:

Scientific Research

Question 1: Will you commit to ensuring that the findings of scientific research conducted by your agency will be communicated accurately, methodology will be transparent and available to those who wish to understand it, and that the scientists who generated the work will have an opportunity to correct any misrepresentations of their work prior to dissemination?

Answer:

Question 2: Do you pledge to use the best available scientific evidence to inform decisions and evidence-based policies, and to communicate clearly and accurately with the public regarding the evidence that informed these decisions and policies?

Answer:

SENATOR GARY PETERS (D-MI)

1. Over the course of Administrations under both parties, NHTSA has fallen behind on rulemakings in response to Congressional mandates. Studies have also found that it takes NHTSA over 5 years on average to complete a rulemaking.
 - a. If confirmed, what is your plan to complete this rulemaking backlog and what steps do you think might be appropriate to improve NHTSA's operations?
 - b. Will you commit to providing timely and transparent updates to Congress on NHTSA's regulatory agenda and progress on specific rulemakings?
2. I have long been a champion of autonomous vehicle technology and believe that, if deployed correctly and responsibly, this technology can transform roadway safety.
 - a. Will you commit to maintaining transparency and safety as guiding principles as you work to provide a regulatory framework for the deployment of autonomous vehicles on our roads?
 - b. What rulemakings do you think it would be appropriate for NHTSA to pursue related to autonomous vehicle testing and deployment?
 - c. Will you commit to sharing updates with Congress, including my staff, on your progress related to an AV framework?
 - d. If confirmed, will you support maintaining NHTSA's Standing General Order on collecting crash data on autonomous and semi-autonomous systems?
3. Vehicle-to-Everything technology, or "V2X", has demonstrated significant potential to reduce crashes, save lives, and improve traffic efficiency. However, the Department of Transportation's National Deployment Plan for V2X was recently taken down, creating uncertainty about the federal government's direction on this critical safety technology. Meanwhile, state and local governments are making considerable investments in V2X infrastructure to improve roadway safety and efficiency.
 - a. Are you willing to work collaboratively with public and private sector stakeholders to develop a voluntary framework for national V2X deployment?
 - b. And will you ensure that NHTSA provides leadership and coordination to support these ongoing investments and maximize the safety and mobility benefits of V2X for all Americans?
4. NHTSA's pending ANPRM on side underride guards estimated very few preventable deaths could be expected with a side underride guard requirement on tractor trailers, making the costs of regulation exceed benefits. This estimate reflected assumptions in the rulemaking's cost-benefit analysis that excluded whole categories of preventable deaths, the largest of which was vulnerable road users (pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorcyclists).

- a. If confirmed, will you commit to considering vulnerable road users (pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorcyclists) in cost-benefit analyses to the furthest extent possible in rulemakings, including reconsidering its use in the above ANPRM?
5. As an avid Motorcyclist and Co-chair of the motorcycle caucus, I am strongly supportive of efforts to improve motorcycle safety given the disproportionate injuries and deaths experienced by motorcycle riders on our roads each year.
 - a. If confirmed, will you commit to working to improve motorcycle safety, including by continuing to carry out the Motorcycle Advisory Council Act, which was passed in 2021?
6. Mr. Morrison, it seems that NHTSA's bumper standards under Part 581 are overdue for an update, particularly since they restrict the placement of critical ADAS sensors used in Automatic Emergency Braking and other modern safety systems. If confirmed, will you look into modernize these standards to support new safety technologies?
7. Thank you for answering my question on NHTSA's global leadership at the hearing. How important do you believe it is for NHTSA to prioritize harmonizing with global standards on rulemakings when possible?

SENATOR BEN RAY LUJÁN (D-NM)

1. The Honoring the Abbas Family Legacy to Terminate Drunk Driving Act – also known as the HALT Act – is a bipartisan law enacted in 2021 as part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. This historic law requires all new vehicles to be equipped with advanced anti-drunk driving technology and, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), will save more than 10,000 lives a year when fully implemented. NHTSA's annual budget request to Congress states that implementing standards for advanced drunk and impaired driving technology will be an agency priority.

How will you prioritize dedicating the necessary time and resources to complete NHTSA's rulemaking on anti-drunk driving technology? Please provide exact details and a proposed timeline.

2. Critics of the HALT Act have cited privacy concerns regarding advanced anti-drunk driving technology. However, the technology is meant to be a vehicle safety feature that simply prevents illegally drunk drivers from operating motor vehicles and putting others on the road at risk. It is NOT meant to put a police officer in your car or otherwise spy on drivers. Moreover, NHTSA is fully capable of building in privacy guardrails and protections in its final rule to safeguard consumer privacy. In fact, in its Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, NHTSA acknowledged that consumer privacy is critical toward establishing public acceptance of this technology.

Do you pledge as NHTSA Administrator to protect privacy and incorporate strong privacy principles in the final regulation implementing the HALT Act?

3. NHTSA has a pending Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on side underride guards, with a cost benefit analysis that estimates that side underride guards will prevent very few deaths. As a result, according to NHTSA, the cost of installing side guards exceeds the benefits. Unfortunately, to reach this estimate, NHTSA makes assumptions in their cost benefit analysis that excludes whole categories of preventable deaths of vulnerable road users such as pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorcyclists. As shown in this video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTRZ1Pj9r7g>) side underride guards can prevent pedestrians and bicyclists from being crushed underneath, causing further injury and death in many circumstances.

Will you commit to counting pedestrians and bicyclists as preventable deaths for vulnerable road users in this cost benefit analysis and future rulemakings on side underride guards?

4. The Driver Alcohol Detection System for Safety (DADSS) program is coming to an end in September 2025. At that time the reference design package will be handed over to the auto industry.

What will you do as NHTSA Administrator to work with auto industry leadership to ensure that this 17-year federal-funded program to develop anti-drunk driving

tech in collaboration with the auto industry will be ready to go in cars and available to consumers as soon as possible?

5. The role of the Department of Transportation is to ensure all vehicles, including those equipped with partially or fully automated driving systems, are safe for all road users. In 2024, nearly 70% of all vehicles sold in the U.S. had some form of automated driving system. Yet the NHTSA has no formal requirements for testing or certifying these vehicles. Additionally, NHTSA has recently relaxed its reporting requirements for autonomous vehicle (AV) crashes, eliminated a significant number of staff specifically focused on AV safety, and has drastically reduced the number of enforcement actions since the start of this administration. One of the most prevalent issues leading to AV crashes is over-trust in the automated system, leading to lack of oversight by the human in the loop. Trust in these systems is built on the assumption that the government is performing its oversight duties to ensure cars and roads are safe for everyone. Yet NHTSA is not only failing to enact mandatory standards to address the unique issues that arise with AVs, but they are loosening the reins.

**(a) What do you plan to do to ensure Americans' trust in AVs is not misguided?
How do you plan to enforce safety mechanisms in autonomous vehicles so we can all benefit from the promise of these technologies?**

(b) What do you see as the most significant safety challenges that are unique to autonomous vehicles?

6. You have agreed to recuse yourself from any matters in which Apple is a party for two years. However, because your non-disclosure agreements prevent you from disclosing your work there, we lack the visibility into what those matters might include.

How can we ensure your recusal is meaningful and effective if we do not have the relevant information?

SENATOR JOHN HICKENLOOPER (D-CO)

Autonomous Vehicles

Despite past Congressional efforts to establish such, there are currently no comprehensive federal statutes or regulations that specifically apply to the testing or operational deployment of fully autonomous vehicles (AVs). Today, many states—including Colorado—have passed their own laws establishing strict requirements for testing and deploying autonomous vehicles. AVs can be a transformative technology only if targeted and rigorous safety regulations are in place.

To maintain robust safety standards and promote the adoption in AVs, what specific lessons do you believe the federal government could learn from the enacted state laws in effect today?

Which examples of AV safety testing or AV deployment from state AV laws do you believe are achievable within NHTSA's existing statutory authorities, and which do you believe would require new authorization from Congress for NHTSA to execute?

Vehicle Communications Infrastructure

Vehicle-to-Everything technology, or "V2X", has demonstrated significant potential to reduce crashes, save lives, and improve traffic efficiency. However, the Department of Transportation's National Deployment Plan for V2X was recently taken down, creating uncertainty about the federal government's direction on this critical safety technology. Meanwhile, state and local governments are making considerable investments in V2X infrastructure to improve roadway safety and efficiency.

Are you willing to work with public and private sector stakeholders to develop a robust voluntary framework for national V2X deployment?

Will you ensure that NHTSA provides coordination to support these ongoing investments and maximize the safety and mobility benefits of V2X technology?

Automatic Emergency Braking

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) required DOT to issue a final rule to require Automatic Emergency Braking (AEB) on all newly manufactured large trucks by November 2023. DOT estimates this technology will save over a hundred lives, prevent thousands of injuries, and tens of thousands of crashes involving large trucks annually. This critical standard is nearly 2 years overdue.

What steps will you commit to taking to expedite the completion of the final AEB rule? When is your target date to issue the final rule?

SENATOR BLUNT ROCHESTER (D-DE)

NHTSA Overdue Rules

Question 1: Since Congress passed the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and allocated more resources to NHTSA four years ago, the agency has now more than doubled its pace of rulemaking on critical safety issues. We still need to do better, but this represents progress.

Do you agree that the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law was effective in easing NHTSA's rulemaking backlog?

Answer:

Question 2: Do you support the funding for staff resources and capacity for NHTSA in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law?

Answer:

Question 3: Will you commit to maintaining NHTSA's workforce that has proven so critical for safety?

Answer:

NHTSA Hot Cars

Question 1: The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law directed NHTSA to issue rulemaking on child safety requiring cars to have a rear seat detector to help prevent children from dying in overheated vehicles.

Will you commit to advancing this rule if confirmed?

Answer: