



U.S. Department  
of Transportation  
**National Highway  
Traffic Safety  
Administration**

1200 New Jersey Avenue SE.  
Washington, DC 20590

February 1, 2023

The Honorable Tim Walberg  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Representative Walberg:

Thank you for your recent letter expressing concern about the safety of autonomous vehicles, those involving crashes with vulnerable road users. I appreciate the opportunity to respond on this important topic.

By way of background, I would like to first clarify how the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) describes driving automation. NHTSA refers to “self-driving” technologies that do not require a driver’s constant attention (and may not require a driver at all) as Automated Driving Systems (ADS). At their maturity, vehicles equipped with ADS would be capable of performing the entire driving task without any monitoring or supervision from a human operator. However, there are currently no ADS-equipped vehicles for sale to consumers in the United States. Nearly all current ADS-equipped vehicles are operating in fleets focused on testing and development.

The agency refers to technologies that *support* drivers but require a human driver to remain fully engaged in the driving task as advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS). These systems are available on vehicles for sale to consumers today and go by many trade names. Due in part to the marketing practices of some manufacturers, consumers and media platforms may incorrectly assume that a vehicle equipped with ADAS is “self-driving.” NHTSA is actively working to educate consumers and the media that ADAS technologies are not self-driving technologies, and that drivers must always remain engaged in the driving task.

The National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act, as amended, requires manufacturers to ensure that their products are free of unreasonable risks to safety. NHTSA’s broad enforcement authority and a Standing General Order (SGO) under which the agency collects safety data are currently the primary mechanisms for identifying and assessing risks posed by vehicles equipped with ADS or Level 2 ADAS technologies.<sup>1</sup> Based on initial analysis of SGO data, crashes involving motorcycles account for less than 2 percent of all reported crashes involving vehicles with either ADS or Level 2 ADAS technologies. NHTSA is, as you stated in your letter, investigating several crashes involving

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<sup>1</sup> ADAS that can be engaged by the driver to simultaneously control both speed and steering is referred to as SAE International driving automation Level 2.

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motorcyclists and vehicles equipped with Level 2 ADAS technologies, though as of now we are not in a position to release any findings. We will do so upon the completion of our investigations.

Currently, NHTSA is conducting research on how vehicles equipped with crash avoidance technologies react to motorcycles, bicyclists, and other vulnerable road users in various scenarios. NHTSA is also working on rulemaking to require automatic emergency braking (AEB), as mandated by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, to help avoid and mitigate crashes with vehicles and pedestrians. The agency will continue to research how AEB and other crash avoidance technologies can help address other serious and fatal crashes, including when an ADAS system is engaged and including crashes involving motorcyclists.

Recognizing the crisis of roadway fatalities and importance of addressing safety in a comprehensive manner, in January 2022, the U.S. Department of Transportation launched the National Roadway Safety Strategy (NRSS). The NRSS adopts a safe system approach to traffic safety, providing actions for safer people, safer roads, safer speeds, safer vehicles, and post-crash care. The NRSS emphasizes the need to take special care to ensure that those road users who are most vulnerable – cyclists, pedestrians, and motorcyclists – are safe. NHTSA is committed to using all the tools available to the agency to implement the NRSS.

Thank you for your interest in promoting safe, reliable, equitable, and efficient transportation in the United States. If you need more information or have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or Ron Thaniel, Director of Governmental and External Affairs at [ron.thaniel@dot.gov](mailto:ron.thaniel@dot.gov). A similar response has been sent to each cosigner of your letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ann Carlson', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Ann Carlson  
Acting Administrator