

October 28, 2022

The Honorable Brian Schatz  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development and Related Agencies Senate  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. Senate (S-128 The Capitol)  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Schatz and Subcommittee Members:

We, the undersigned organizations, write to express our **support for allocating funding towards research on how emerging autonomous vehicle (AV) technology may impact communities of color in the FY (Fiscal Year) 2023 Senate THUD Appropriations bill.**

In addition, we request the Senate bill to recede the provision included in the House bill which directs the Department of Transportation to partner with accredited universities – particularly historically Black colleges or universities (HBCUs), and Hispanic serving institutions (HSIs) – to conduct research on the opinions and unique needs of communities of color in advance of the widespread adoption of AVs.

Minority communities today face significant challenges in traffic safety, geographic isolation, and lack of mobility. Autonomous vehicle technology has the potential to address some of these issues. Autonomous Vehicles (AVs) might, for one, ensure safer streets. Traffic-related fatalities fall disproportionately on minority communities: Native Americans are nearly three times as likely to die in a traffic fatality as white Americans.<sup>1</sup> African Americans are 20 percent more likely to die in traffic accidents than white Americans.<sup>2</sup> Latino pedestrians are 33% more likely to die from their injuries than their white counterparts. Research shows that at least 90% of car crashes are caused by human error, with studies suggesting that putting AVs on the road now could save hundreds of thousands of lives over the long term. Research shows that at least 90% of car crashes are caused by human error, with studies suggesting that putting AVs on the road now could save hundreds of thousands of lives over the long term.

Further research funded through the FY2023 Senate THUD Appropriations bill could examine how AVs could help close gaps in transit and essential resources as seen in transit and food deserts. These inequities are a direct result of lack of access whether it be to healthy food options and grocery stores or public transportation. Minority, low-income, and disabled communities have traditionally not been considered in transit systems or by businesses like grocery stores.<sup>3</sup>

Black and Latino neighborhoods tend to have fewer supermarkets and more small retail stores with fewer produce options than in predominantly white communities. At the same time, low-income households also have less economic capital to access fresh produce. Traditional transit systems have also historically contributed to inequality for disadvantaged minority and disabled communities. While Black people are more likely to rely upon public transportation accounting for 60% of all public transit riders, Black and

---

<sup>1</sup>Retting, R. (2021, June). An Analysis of Traffic Fatalities by Race and Ethnicity. Governors Highway Safety Association. <https://www.ghsa.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/An%20Analysis%20of%20Traffic%20Fatalities%20by%20Race%20and%20Ethnicity.pdf>

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. (See: Retting, R. (2021, June). An Analysis of Traffic Fatalities by Race and Ethnicity. Governors Highway Safety Association. <https://www.ghsa.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/An%20Analysis%20of%20Traffic%20Fatalities%20by%20Race%20and%20Ethnicity.pdf>)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.urban.org/features/unequal-commute>;  
<https://www.nrdc.org/experts/nina-sevilla/food-apartheid-racialized-access-healthy-affordable-food>

Brown people are more likely to experience one-way commutes to work that are 60 minutes or longer. AV technology may help to shorten commute times and help deliver groceries and food via low-speed, seatless, passengerless autonomous vehicles. In addition, such vehicles can also be used by the 13.4 million Americans between the ages of 18 and 64 with self-reported travel-limiting disabilities, who will no longer need to drive themselves with the technology.<sup>4</sup>

As technology rapidly advances toward AV deployment, we are looking to policymakers to harness the potential of emerging innovations while proactively creating a regulatory environment capable of adequately protecting community interests. To effectuate the above, we recommend including the following report language:

“Autonomous vehicle perspectives in communities of color: The Committee believes that autonomous vehicles and automated driving systems can improve mobility for communities of color. The Committee directs the Secretary to partner with accredited universities of higher education, including historically black colleges or universities (HBCUs), and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), or consortia thereof, to conduct research and to work with historically marginalized communities to evaluate the opinions, perspectives, and unique needs of communities of color as it pertains to autonomous vehicle adoption, including passenger and package delivery vehicles.”

Congress has an opportunity to invest in critical research that will ensure communities of color benefit from the deployment of AVs rather than further exacerbating disparities that already plague them. We welcome the opportunity to engage with you further to achieve this shared goal. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Chamber of Progress  
Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers  
African American Mayors Association

---

<sup>4</sup> Travel Patterns of American Adults with Disabilities, U.S. Department of Transportation, Bureau of Transportation Statistics (Jan. 2022) <https://www.bts.gov/travel-patterns-with-disabilities>