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August 31, 2026

The Honorable Jonathan Morrison
Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590-0001

**SUBJECT: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Guidance: AV
Framework [Docket No. NHTSA-2026-1552]**

Administrator Morrison:

On behalf of the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO), I am responding to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's (NHTSA) request for comment on updating the NHTSA's Automated Vehicle (AV) Framework [Docket No. NHTSA-2026-1552].

Our member cities and transit agencies across the U.S. have real-world experience with the impacts of autonomous vehicles (AVs) operating on public streets and must be able to make decisions about their transportation systems. When done right, AVs offer an opportunity to make streets safer, increase access to transportation for communities without reliable public transportation, and enhance American competitiveness in international markets. When done haphazardly, incorporating AVs onto America's streets will make our cities less safe and more congested.

NACTO encourages thoughtful policy and regulations that ensure new and improved technologies create a safer transportation system. Our priorities, embodied in our [practical guide for cities getting started with AVs](#) and [Principles for Autonomous Vehicles on City Streets](#), reflect the needs of cities in different states and regions across the country.

NACTO supports the overall intent of the AV Framework, which is to prioritize safety, promote innovation, and outline a pathway to testing AVs that are exempt from certain Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS).

NACTO offers the following considerations for the updated AV Framework, organized by the areas outlined in the request:

Interim Guidance Concerning Commercial Deployment Exemptions

1. **Routine interactions with first responders:** The interim guidance needs to be updated to reflect the real-world challenges that first responders in NACTO cities have experienced, including the inability to move AVs quickly from emergency scenes. These are not edge cases, as police and firefighters from cities are regularly forced to move ADS-equipped vehicles from situations where they pose a safety hazard, thereby interrupting their ability to respond to the underlying emergency. For the interim guidance, cities and first responders need information from the vehicle developer on how to stop, access, move, and tow the vehicles. A single first responder needs to be able to do these tasks with limited training. While this information would support first responders facing these problems now, it is not acceptable for AV operators to scale operations while relying on limited city resources to provide roadside assistance to these vehicles.

As NHTSA further develops its interim guidance, the safety features description should include: how first responders should access the vehicle; how to determine when the vehicle is capable of moving and when driving ability is disabled; and how to move the vehicle from either condition. We suggest including a performance measure for how quickly a vehicle can be timely accessed and moved with the least possible use of first responder resources.

2. **Role of Remote Assistance:** Similarly, NHTSA should request information from operators on remote assistance as part of the exemption process and provide guidance. Critical pieces should be standards for the role and response times of remote assistance in the event of citywide issues affecting large parts of the fleet, vehicle immobilizations, first-responder interactions, and, more generally, standards for the scale and speed of remote assistance available relative to fleet size.

AV immobilizations can create gridlock even in the absence of an underlying emergency response; in other words, they can *create* emergencies or otherwise severely impact a transportation system. There should be high expectations for remote support tools. Those should be even higher for purpose-built vehicles that first responders may be unable to move when necessary. Additionally, NHTSA should collect information and provide guidance to ensure that remote staff who have the capacity to drive a vehicle remotely or remotely provide detailed context-specific routing guidance are licensed U.S. drivers and physically located in the continental U.S.

NHTSA should apply the highest level of scrutiny to exemption applications in which a manufacturer seeks authority for a vehicle with level 4 or 5 automation and does not plan to provide ongoing monitoring and remote assistance.

3. **Power and Communications Capacity:** NHTSA should specifically incorporate in exemption considerations scrutiny of reserve battery power protocols and

communications redundancy. Where loss of power or loss of communication could strand vehicles on public roads, these factors are essential to evaluating a fleet's overall safety. These factors should be considered in relation to fleet size and to an operator's ability to rapidly scale its roadside assistance capacity when needed — during normal daily operations, major civic events, and civic emergencies and disasters.

4. **Emergency and Disaster Coordination and Cooperation:** NHTSA should also seek information about how manufacturers intend to work with local agencies before, during, and after major planned events and emergency incidents by sharing real-time operational information (including vehicle immobilizations, service disruptions, and recovery efforts), integrating into incident command, and complying with operational directives from public officials.

Streamlined Crash Reporting

Robust data-sharing requirements allow state and local governments to access and use data from emerging technology to inform and enforce regulations, laws, programs, and plans. Standardized, comprehensive data collection is essential for evaluating how AVs affect transportation system performance relative to human-driven vehicles.

We support robust data reporting on AV incidents, and, in fact, many NACTO cities maintain their own incident dashboards. NACTO appreciates the previous updates to the Standing General Order (SGO), but it should be expanded further.

We continue to advocate that the SGO collision reporting include all collisions, and at least the following: collisions that result in fatalities or serious injuries; crashes with over \$1,000 in damage (aligning with state crash reporting requirements); collisions involving vulnerable road users; collisions with fixed objects; and all collisions involving autonomous vehicles with no human driving controls.

Due to redactions made by NHTSA, it is almost impossible for cities to use the SGO Collision reporting. The data lacks location information compared with other crash data cities receive. Only geographic information can help cities, as infrastructure owner-operators, understand their role in ADS safety. City traffic engineers and other infrastructure owners evaluate motor vehicle crashes to determine whether infrastructure improvements are needed. These evaluations are often extremely site-specific. Without the locations of collisions, we cannot be partners in safer streets and help maintain public trust and transparency in the deployment of AVs.

FMVSS Modernization

NACTO also supports the FMVSS modernization effort, which seeks to “maintain the level of safety performance required by the current standard.” We again urge NHTSA to take into account first responder interactions with vehicles that cannot be moved by traditional means. First responders need to be able to quickly stop, access, move, and tow these vehicles, and doing so

easily and without damaging emergency response vehicles or materially impairing first responder activities is critical to assessing the safety of vehicles with FMVSS exemptions.

We suggest including performance measures that respond to these questions:

- How many times are first responders called to an automated vehicle? This would include the number of times they are called to wake up an unconscious passenger;
- How many times have first responders moved an ADS vehicle;
- How many moving violations and civil violations ADS systems receive;
- How many times and how long an ADS blocks traffic;
- How well an ADS responds to and obeys geofencing commands;
- How well does an ADS comply with restrictions on particular routes;
- How well does a manufacturer suspend service in response to widespread incidents, such as blackouts, without waiting for existing trips to conclude;
- How often first responders interact with remote assistance, and how quickly they are able to resolve issues;
- How long does it take to reach a remote assistance operator who is capable of resolving the situation;
- How often does an ADS-equipped vehicle fail to understand hand signals;
- Number of times ADS-equipped vehicles block transit stops or transit-only lanes;
- How often do ADS-equipped vehicles get into planned closures?

As with many of these matters, self-reported answers from vehicle manufacturers should not be relied on without investigation into the experiences of first responders who have already interacted with the vehicles, tested them, or deployed them on public roads.

Public Participation

Developing clear and consistent standards and a level playing field for AV companies requires involvement from federal, state, and local governments, and private industry. The most effective regulation and guidance will come from input from cities that regularly experience operational and implementation impacts, since vehicles operating on city streets raise unique local concerns.

NACTO recommends organizing a new stakeholder group to bring together cities, states, the U.S. DOT, and private industry to provide input into AV standards on public streets. Federally funded industry standards organizations should be required to include representation from cities when developing engineering and technology standards for AVs and other mobility technologies.

Additionally, NHTSA points out several events it has held for stakeholder input, all of which occurred in Washington, DC, a city far from any communities with ADS-equipped vehicle deployments. Municipal budgets often do not allow cities to send representatives to these events. That does not make cities and first responders any less important as stakeholders in this conversation; it just means their voices are not heard. We would suggest greater engagement with first responders in deployed cities and with city stakeholders responsible for city transportation systems. NACTO coordinates and hosts monthly meetings with an AV Working Group to share

information, connect member agencies, and provide a forum for peers to discuss AV planning and operations. NACTO and our members would be happy to directly engage with NHTSA.

It's in everyone's interest — from the family heading to soccer practice to the American automotive industry — that the best and safest technologies are on the market. As AV technology develops, NACTO and our member cities look forward to engaging in the conversation with NHTSA and private companies to ensure that safety remains at the forefront of decision-making, that technology is proven before it is deployed widely, and that cities' needs are represented.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this process. NACTO and its members look forward to future conversations with the NHTSA about its AV work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ryan Russo", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Ryan Russo
Executive Director
National Association of City Transportation Officials