

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

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

**REPUBLICAN QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD**

*Mr. Jonathan Morrison*

**COVER PAGE**

**SENATOR JOHN THUNE (R-SD)**

1. Mr. Morrison, do you agree that autonomous vehicles (AVs) have the potential to improve traffic safety?

*Yes. Properly developed and operated AVs have the unique ability to prevent the vast majority of crashes, injuries, and fatalities caused by human choices and errors—impairment, distraction, and speeding.*

2. If confirmed, will you commit to making the adoption and deployment of new safety technologies like AVs a priority at the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration?

*While AV and other technology developers have the ability to deploy without pre-approval from NHTSA, the agency can foster development and deployment by engaging with industry and establishing best practices, guidance, removal of unintended barriers to designs enabled by automated driving systems, and eventual regulation. If confirmed, I will work with the Secretary to realize his vision for an AV framework to assure safe deployment.*

**SENATOR JERRY MORAN (R-KS)**

1. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, under the previous administration, had taken requirements from the last Surface Transportation Reauthorization for the State Highway Safety Grant Programs and expanded them beyond the Congressional intent – resulting in increased red tape in delivering these safety programs.

Will you work with the states to find ways to reduce administrative red tape so that more of the money intended for safety programs can be put to work improving safety on our roadways?

*If confirmed, I would help implement the Secretary's vision for reducing red tape. While the agency must ensure that taxpayer dollars are appropriately spent, removal of unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles to the efficient distribution of safety-focused grant funding would be a priority. This would likely involve working with the States to identify specific areas for streamlining administrative requirements.*

2. Under the last administration, NHTSA changed how State Highway Safety Offices (SHSOs) plan and report on their use of federal grant funds, requiring they submit plans every three years and an annual update on changes and grant activity for the fiscal year. Kansas' Annual Grant Application for FY24 ended up being 493 pages to provide all the information required by NHTSA, creating an overly cumbersome process.

How will you work with the states to find ways to enhance coordination and collaboration in prioritizing safety, while also being cognizant of minimizing cumbersome tasks?

*If confirmed, I would help implement the Secretary's vision for reducing red tape. This would likely involve creation of working groups with States, NHTSA headquarter officials, and NHTSA regional offices to identify specific areas for streamlining administrative requirements in a manner that maintains appropriate oversight over taxpayer dollars to ensure they are used to maximize safety outcomes.*

3. Integral to the mission of the agency you are nominated to lead is coordination with other federal departments and agencies and with states, localities, and industry stakeholders to deliver safe and efficient transportation networks.

How will you leverage relationships with state departments of transportation, metropolitan planning organizations, local governments, and other partners to navigate diverse transportation safety needs while upholding a uniform standard of safety throughout the country?

*Consistent communication between NHTSA headquarters and regional offices, State and local governments, and other safety stakeholders, is critical to understanding the safety challenges unique to each locale while also setting expectations for deployment of countermeasures.*

**SENATOR MARSHA BLACKBURN (R-TN)**

1. NHTSA has a horrible track record of meeting deadlines set by Congress. A 2022 GAO report revealed that NHTSA failed to complete 17 of 22 mandated rulemakings by their statutory deadlines. These deadlines are not suggestions—they're law. President Trump has focused on cutting through bureaucracy and right-sizing federal agencies to ensure that deadlines are met and efficiency is a priority. What steps are you planning to decrease the long delay times for NHTSA responses to official requests?

*Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards are technical/engineering standards that must meet strict criteria in the Motor Vehicle Safety Act and notice-and-comment rulemaking requirements of the Administrative Procedure Act. Ensuring standards are objective, practicable, meet the need for motor vehicle safety and grounded upon a sound scientific basis is critical both to ensuring legal sufficiency, cost-effectiveness, and avoiding unintended adverse safety consequences. Ensuring the necessary scientific basis requires research. If appropriate and relevant research on a particular technology does not yet exist, NHTSA must carry out or sponsor that research itself, which takes time to plan and conduct. If confirmed, I will ensure NHTSA's rulemaking resources are appropriately allocated to required rulemaking.. Further, I understand that the Government Accountability Office recently issued recommendations to NHTSA on reducing the rulemaking timeline, with which the agency concurred. If confirmed, I will work to ensure these recommendations are implemented where appropriate.*

**SENATOR TED BUDD (R-NC)**

1. It's critical for America that NHTSA writes new FMVSS specifically for AVs. Harmonizing AV regulation nationally via robust federal AV rules will promote regulatory certainty for industry and will ensure all American consumers are protected by the same regulations. If NHTSA cannot get the right regulations in place soon to support the safe and quick deployment of this technology, we'll see other countries try to steal America's lead. China is already trying to take advantage and leapfrog the U.S. like they have in so many other industries. As NHTSA administrator, do you commit to establishing ADS-specific FMVSS and prioritizing the US remaining the global leader on AVs?

*If confirmed, I will prioritize realizing the Secretary's vision of an AV framework that enables safe deployment of the technology to ensure the United States remains the global leader in AV technological development and deployment.*

2. On December 3, 2024, NHTSA issued a final decision notice adding four new advanced driver assistance systems technologies to the New Car Assessment Program. This notice includes these new technologies in NHTSA's assessment starting with the 2026 Model Year, which manufacturers could begin selling in January 2025. Essentially, NHTSA provided only 1 month of lead-time to the industry for this program. If confirmed, will you work with industry to set more reasonable timeframes for NHTSA programs?

*Yes.*

3. Under the last administration NHTSA expanded reporting and compliance requirements for several grant programs. Instead of working to reduce drunk driving or encourage seatbelt use, state employees are spending their time jumping through hoops and filling out paperwork. If confirmed, will you work with states to reduce administrative red tape so that NHTSA's programs can actually be put to work improving safety on our roadways?

*Yes. While the agency must ensure that taxpayer dollars are appropriately administered, removal of unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles to the efficient distribution of safety-focused grant funding will be a priority, should I be confirmed.*

4. Last month, our friends across the Capitol held a hearing on the state of the auto industry. Each panelist had the same message: industry needs a well-resourced and transparent regulator in order to flourish and maintain US Competitiveness, but NHTSA is not working well. Safety groups, regulated parties, and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety all agree that NHTSA needs to be better than it has been in the recent past. What are your top ideas to make NHTSA a collaborative and transparent agency again?

*If confirmed, I plan to provide avenues for consistent and deep communication between agency leadership and staff, industry, and technical safety experts. Doing so is critical to ensuring*

*NHTSA understands how technology is developing, and industry understands agency priorities and concerns.*

5. Many innocent people have lost their lives in a gruesome and preventable kind of traffic crash known as “underride.” These underride crashes can happen at the rear and sides of large commercial trucks and are caused by the mismatch between the tall bottom edge of trailers and the relatively lower heights of all other vehicles that share the roads with them. Many of these underride casualties are pedestrians and bicyclists, who are especially vulnerable to being trapped under the tandem wheels of large trucks in low-speed encounters on town and city streets.

Those fatalities can be prevented by side underride guards, which act to block pedestrians and cyclists from falling beneath the tractor-trailer and being crushed to death under its rear wheels. NHTSA knows about this problem and announced a proposed rulemaking for side underride guards, which remains pending. In the last administration, however, NHTSA did not count preventing the deaths of pedestrians and bicyclists as a benefit of its proposed rulemaking.

Will you, as NHTSA Administrator, conduct a full cost-benefit analysis of this pending proposed rulemaking or any future rulemaking on side underride guards?

*If confirmed, I would work with agency economists to ensure that appropriate factors are considered as part of any benefit-cost analyses.*

**SENATOR ERIC SCHMITT (R-MO)**

1. In the past, vehicle owners controlled the data their cars generated—like its mileage, tire pressure, and location. But with connected vehicles, automakers are increasingly limiting that access. When owners have access to and control over their data, they can ensure proper maintenance and monitor driving safety, which will ultimately help improve traffic flow. Given the implications raised by some stakeholders, can you commit to working with me to ensure owners retain appropriate access to their vehicle data?

*Failure to appropriately maintain or service vehicles has safety consequences ranging from brake failure to sudden loss of motive power to tire blow outs. The ability of vehicle owners to service and maintain their own vehicles, or have their vehicles serviced or maintained at the facility of their choice is important to ensuring safety. If confirmed, I would support efforts to provide consumers with secure access to data necessary to maintain or service their vehicles.*

2. As part of the Infrastructure Jobs and Investment Act (IIJA), NHTSA's regulations are required to define what constitutes both "public participation and engagement" and "effective community collaboration". They have even gone so far as to say that if a highway safety program did not originate from a request of the affected community, then such a program does not meet public participation expectations of the law. For example, if Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) were to go to a school district or a local community that has low seat belt use and recommend some programs or countermeasures the school or community could implement, NHTSA has, at times, only deemed this eligible for a grant if the idea originated from the community itself. This has resulted in increased administrative burdens for highway safety programs, diverting time and resources from implementation.

How do you plan to work with states to reduce administrative red tape so that the states and their highway safety partners can spend more time implementing safety programs than administering them?

*If confirmed, I would help implement the Secretary's vision for reducing red tape. While the agency must ensure that taxpayer dollars are appropriately spent, removal of unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles to the efficient distribution of safety-focused grant funding would be a priority. This would likely involve working with the States to identify specific areas for streamlining administrative requirements.*

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.

Given this momentum of V2X, are you willing to work collaboratively with public and private sector stakeholders to develop a voluntary framework for national V2X deployment? 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?

*V2X technologies provide great potential safety and efficiency benefits for next generation vehicles, other road users, and infrastructure. If confirmed, I would work with the Secretary to achieve his vision for efficient and effective V2X deployment to achieve positive safety outcomes.*