



*Statement of*

**Chris Spear  
President and CEO  
American Trucking Associations**

*Before the*

**Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
Subcommittee on Surface Transportation, Freight, Pipelines, and Safety  
United States Senate**

*Hearing on*

**“Shifting Gears: Issues Impacting the  
Trucking & Commercial Bus Industries”**

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## **Introduction:**

Chairman Young, Ranking Member Peters, and members of the Subcommittee, I am grateful for the opportunity to testify today on the key issues facing the trucking industry. I am the President & CEO of the American Trucking Associations (ATA), a 90-year-old federation and the largest national trade organization representing the 8.5 million men and women working in the trucking industry, including more than 3.5 million professional truck drivers.

As a 50-state federation that encompasses 37,000 motor carriers and suppliers, ATA proudly represents every sector of the industry. From less-than-truckload to truckload carriers, from agriculture and livestock transporters to auto haulers and household goods movers, and from large fleets to mom-and-pop one-truck operators, ATA serves as the single unified voice of the trucking industry.

Trucking is the backbone of the nation's economy, with more than 80% of U.S. communities relying *exclusively* on trucking to meet their freight transportation needs. According to federal data, heavy and tractor-trailer truck driver is a top-ten most common occupation in 18 states.<sup>1</sup> These truck drivers are the unsung heroes of our supply chain and keep the wheels of our economy turning. In 2023, they drove almost 330 billion miles—the equivalent of 13 million trips around the globe—to deliver roughly 11.4 billion tons of freight,<sup>2</sup> 73% of the nation's annual tonnage.<sup>3</sup> Over the next decade, those drivers will be tasked with hauling an additional 2.7 billion tons of freight above current volumes.<sup>4</sup>

ATA was one of the first industry trade associations to endorse the bipartisan Senate bill that became the landmark 2021 *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* (IIJA). We hope and trust that the collaboration that provided increased resources to counter years of neglect to our nation's highways will continue with the next reauthorization even as current law expires months before a midterm election.

IIJA represented a historic 38% increase in funding for roads and bridges, which are the shop floor for our nation's truck drivers. Unfortunately, the impact of this historic investment was diminished by inflation, political distractions, and economic uncertainty over the past four years. Over the first nine months of fiscal year 2024, the government spent approximately \$35 billion on bridges and highways, but after adjusting for higher construction costs, that's 24% less than the same period in the year before the IIJA was enacted.<sup>5</sup> Some important programs were rolled out slowly, and with additional red tape beyond the requirements laid out in statute.

Since the enactment of the IIJA, freight markets have remained stagnant while costs for motor carriers have increased. Analysis from the American Transportation Research Institute (ATRI) shows that, excluding fuel costs, marginal costs per mile for truck operations have risen to the highest recorded levels (\$1.779 per mile on average) in the history of its annual Operational Costs of Trucking report,<sup>6</sup> all while ATA's trucking activity report shows that for-hire truckload freight has declined 3% between December 2021 and May 2025.<sup>7</sup> As we look towards the next surface transportation reauthorization, it is

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<sup>1</sup> *Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics*. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. May 2024. <https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oesrcst.htm>

<sup>2</sup> *American Trucking Trends 2025*. American Trucking Associations, 2025.

<sup>3</sup> *Freight Transportation Forecast 2024 to 2035*. American Trucking Associations, 2024.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Rampell, Catherine, "The legacy of Bidenomics: Maybe not much at all." Washington Post, 7 January 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2025/01/07/biden-economy-bidenomics-legacy-inflation/>

<sup>6</sup> *An Analysis of the Operational Costs of Trucking: 2025 Update*. American Transportation Research Institute, July 2025.

<sup>7</sup> *ATA Trucking Activity Report (TRAC)*. American Trucking Associations, 2025.

vitality important that we find ways to make investments and set policies that will empower trucking companies of all sizes to put skilled, well-trained drivers in newer, safer trucks on our freight corridors.

In a difficult environment, this Committee has found bipartisan consensus on issues important to the trucking industry, such as cutting red tape for supply chain workers to obtain valuable credentials through passage of the *Transportation Security Screening Modernization Act* last year. We are grateful that the Committee has already shined a light on the growing threat of cargo theft for our supply chains in its February hearing titled, “Grand Theft Cargo: Examining the Costly Threat to Consumers and the U.S. Supply Chain,” and advanced common-sense bipartisan bills such as the *Household Goods Shipping Consumer Protection Act* and the *Promoting Resilient Supply Chains Act*.

This hearing is a tremendous opportunity for the Committee to consider how to improve highway safety, recruit the next generation of truck drivers to fulfilling careers, protect supply chains from sophisticated and organized criminals, and ensure long-term American leadership in innovation and infrastructure. We commend you for bringing this panel together, and for your continued efforts to craft policies that will ensure the safe and efficient movement of our nation’s goods.

### **Opportunities to Increase Highway Safety:**

Safety is a key focus and priority for the trucking industry. We welcomed IJA investments in federal roadway safety programs, and the industry welcomes partnerships with agencies and technology innovators that will make our highways safer. Trucking companies make major investments every day in proven safety technologies for their fleets: ATA’s 2022 Safety Spend Survey showed that the industry invested \$14 billion annually in safety, an increase of over 40% above the preceding 2015 survey.<sup>8</sup> Federal regulatory reforms supported by ATA have reduced both the number of truck-involved crashes and the crash rate over the past several decades. However, more must be done to improve highway safety for all motorists. ATA looks forward to supporting workable requirements to deploy proven safety technologies, improve drug testing to meaningfully curb the rise of impaired driving, ensure compliance with federal training requirements, and enforce driver qualification requirements to make roadways safer for all road users.

### **Clear Requirements for Proven Safety Technologies**

Congress and the trucking industry need to ensure that the safety technologies on commercial vehicles enhance drivers’ attention and alertness while on the road. One technology that needs immediate attention is Automatic Emergency Braking (AEB). AEB, and the suite of tools that support it, is a prime example of a proven safety technology that can reduce and mitigate crashes. Because AEB is already a mature and well adopted safety technology in the heavy-duty sector, Congress directed the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) in 2021 to *mandate* AEB on all new heavy-duty trucks, ensuring the proliferation of this critical safety tool. This is because AEB technology had been available for more than 10 years in the heavy-duty sector at that point with clearly demonstrated benefits. It is worth noting that this technology has gone through many iterations over these 10+ years to improve its effectiveness, integration, and driver experience based on industry feedback.

Last year, DOT proposed an AEB mandate for industry segments outside of heavy-duty, where the technology is still under development and has not been widely adopted. This exceeded Congressional intent to focus on heavy-duty where the technology is mature. AEB is not widely available in medium-

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<sup>8</sup> 2022 ATA Safety Spend Survey. American Trucking Associations, 2023. <https://www.trucking.org/news-insights/new-study-underlines-trucking-industrys-commitment-safety>.

duty and in particular vocational vehicle segments. New developments for different vehicle configurations, braking technologies, and sensor placements would be required to deploy AEB in these segments in the proposed timeframe. While industry is currently working on these issues, the systems are not yet developed at the same level of effectiveness, integration, and driver experience as heavy-duty. The mandate also proposed overly aggressive braking standards that effectively treat AEB as a replacement for the driver, a standard for which AEB is not designed. AEB and the suite of tools around it have always been designed as a driver assistance technology. AEB is designed specifically to help the driver respond more effectively, buy time for the driver to avoid hazards, and potentially mitigate crashes if the driver cannot respond in time. Industry has spent immense time and effort building driver trust in this technology and wants to ensure the technology is rolled out appropriately and over a realistic timeframe—*when it is truly ready*—in order to maintain that trust. ATA urges this Subcommittee to provide oversight of DOT on this matter to ensure that regulation focuses on *heavy-duty* AEB, that the DOT applies performance requirements that represent the design intent of the technology, and that DOT works with industry to overcome barriers to implementation. Industry is eager to work with the DOT on AEB beyond the heavy-duty sector, but these efforts should be separate so as not to delay a rule in heavy-duty which could save lives in the near term.

### Testing for Drug Use

Ensuring that our roads are free from drivers under the influence of controlled substances is a top priority for the trucking industry. Since the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) Drug and Alcohol Clearinghouse launched in 2020, more than 308,000 positive drug tests among commercial motor vehicle drivers have been recorded, highlighting a persistent and alarming trend in substance use that threatens the safety of our nation's highways.<sup>9</sup> Of these positive drug tests, marijuana remains the leading drug violation among drivers, accounting for roughly 60% of positive tests annually—a troubling statistic that underscores its widespread impact on highway safety.

Last year, Attorney General Merrick Garland moved to reschedule marijuana from a Schedule I to a Schedule III substance, raising serious concerns about the unintended consequences for highway safety. Such a move would have weakened zero-tolerance policies, compromised a robust federal drug testing program currently in place for safety-sensitive professions, significantly complicated enforcement, and potentially increased marijuana use among all drivers. Given the absence of a validated standard for measuring marijuana impairment and the fact that it already accounts for most drug violations in the FMCSA Clearinghouse, rescheduling marijuana would jeopardize the safety of millions of road users. This Subcommittee must ensure that effective and robust drug testing protocols for safety-sensitive occupations remain intact, and that transportation safety is prioritized regardless of the legal status of marijuana at the federal level.

Additionally, employers need to be equipped with the most effective, reliable tools for ensuring a drug-free driving workforce. The 2015 *FAST Act* required the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to issue guidelines for hair testing – a proven alternative drug testing method that allows for a longer detection window than traditional urinalysis and yields more comprehensive results. However, a decade later, HHS has yet to finalize the guidance in accordance with Congress' original intent, leaving DOT without the means to accept and recognize hair testing results in its Drug and Alcohol Clearinghouse. ATA supports efforts like H.R. 4320, which would allow positive hair testing results to be added to the Clearinghouse and give employers another tool to ensure that unsafe drivers are not put behind the wheel. Dereliction of duty by HHS has had disastrous consequences for highway safety: the

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<sup>9</sup> *Drug & Alcohol Clearinghouse: March 2025 Monthly Summary Report*. U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, March 2025.

absence of guidance means that nothing prevents a driver who tests positive on a hair test from legally operating a truck on our nation's highways today. Another critical tool, oral fluids testing, remains in regulatory limbo awaiting federal finalization of laboratory certifications before it can be used by employers in post-accident and roadside contexts. Federal acceptance of both oral fluids and hair testing as independent, alternative testing methods would allow employers to identify a greater number of safety-sensitive employees who violate federal drug laws and keep these unsafe drivers off the road. We urge this Subcommittee to hold HHS accountable and require the agency to swiftly complete the regulatory steps necessary to ensure these critical alternative testing methods are made available to employers, as well as investigate and identify potential regulatory barriers that may be adding to ongoing delays.

### *Distracted Driving*

Addressing distracted driving among all roadway users—commercial drivers and passenger vehicle drivers—is vitally important to ATA and its members. ATA recognizes distracted driving—whether manual, visual, cognitive, or emotional—as a form of impaired driving. Any activity that diverts a driver's attention threatens roadway and industry safety and endangers all road users. Far too often, distraction is the cause of tragedy on our nation's roadways. According to NHTSA, in 2022, distraction was a causal factor in 8% of fatal crashes and 12% of injury crashes; however, those figures are likely much higher as distraction goes largely underreported in official statistics due to drivers failing to admit to being distracted, difficulty for law enforcement to detect distraction, and inconsistent crash reporting.

ATA is committed to working with this Subcommittee and relevant stakeholders—law enforcement, federal and state regulators and legislators, safety advocates, and drivers—to tackle this epidemic. This begins with effective and robust enforcement of existing handsfree and distraction laws. ATA supports federal, state, and local laws prohibiting handheld wireless device use while driving, emphasizing truly hands-free operation. These laws and policies should apply to and be strictly enforced among all motorists, not just commercial drivers, to promote safer roads. Because commercial drivers rely on essential in-cab technologies, lawmakers must consider how best to integrate the safe use of these vital tools while minimizing visual-manual interaction and distraction and allow safe use of hands-free technologies such as voice-activated dialing or voicemail retrieval.

ATA is also committed to prioritizing awareness, enforcement, and technology-driven solutions that reduce distracted driving and improve roadway safety for all. We believe safety campaigns that highlight the grave consequences of distracted driving can lead to greater awareness and behavioral changes that ultimately lead to cultural shifts in how we think about and accept risky driving behaviors. We recognize that these shifts take time and continuous exposure to safety messaging, much like the cultural shift towards universal seatbelt use in the 1990s. Thus, it is critical that this Subcommittee ensures critical DOT funding and other resources dedicated to distracted driving campaigns and awareness efforts remain intact and, if possible, amplified.

### *Rigorous Driver Training Standards*

We also urge the Subcommittee to support efforts to ensure a qualified and well-trained workforce and reject ongoing efforts to exempt training requirements for new drivers. ATA has long supported the Entry Level Driver Training (ELDT) rule, which was implemented three years ago. Ensuring that entry-level drivers receive appropriate instruction from a consistent, industry-wide curriculum is vital to improving safety on our nation's highways. While ELDT has received nearly universal support from the industry, ATA is aware that the spread of misinformation led to efforts to undermine the program and exempt certain individuals from this standardized training curriculum. We urge this Subcommittee to

uphold its commitment to rigorous training standards for both new and veteran drivers, ensuring the highest level of safety on our nation's roads.

In addition to maintaining the integrity of ELDT requirements, FMCSA must continue its work to improve oversight of its Training Provider Registry (TPR). ATA strongly supports efforts to root out fraudulent or substandard training providers and ensure that only legitimate, high-quality ELDT-compliant programs are listed on the TPR. These efforts must include increased auditing, enforcement actions, and data validation to prevent drivers from accessing incomplete or inadequate training and testing. Without these safeguards, more unqualified drivers would be on our nation's highways—a safety risk our nation simply can't afford. ATA and our industry partners oppose unqualified training providers that allow individuals to obtain a commercial driver's license (CDL) simply by paying a fee, effectively circumventing the structured curriculum established by ELDT. While FMCSA has made progress in establishing tools for ELDT enforcement, until early June 2025, FMCSA's TPR website showed that only four training providers have been removed from the TPR since 2023. Federal, state, and industry stakeholders all recognize that these numbers are unacceptable given the much larger volume of fraud reports to the agency. Ensuring the quality of driver education is just as important as ensuring its consistency, and we commend FMCSA's recent efforts to close loopholes, remove bad actors from the TPR, and strengthen trust in the training pipeline by removing over 50 training providers from the registry in June. While some of these removals were involuntary or on an emergency basis (based on a provider failing to meet or maintain federal and state requirements and ELDT qualifications), many of these removals were "voluntary." For example, one removal was based on a training provider closing its doors which suggests an urgent need to audit the registry and weed out shoddy providers. We urge this Subcommittee to play a role in pushing this critical action to prevent exploitation, preserve the value of the ELDT program, and improve safety.

Additionally, ATA strongly supports expanded enforcement of driver qualification requirements, including English Language Proficiency (ELP). Driver qualification standards are a fundamental component of ensuring roadway safety. The ability to understand and respond to traffic signs, communicate with law enforcement, and complete required reports and logs is essential to the safe operation of commercial vehicles on our nation's roadway—and has long been a federal motor carrier safety regulation. As outlined in 49 CFR § 391.11(b)(2), commercial motor vehicle drivers operating in the U.S. must be able to read and speak English "sufficiently to converse with the general public, to understand highway traffic signs and signals..., to respond to official inquiries, and to make entries on reports and records." ATA applauds the Trump Administration and this Congress for taking action to clarify and enforce this longstanding requirement. In keeping with the President's April 28<sup>th</sup> Executive Order, "Enforcing Commonsense Rules of the Road for America's Truck Drivers," the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance (CVSA) reenacted ELP requirements as part of its Out-of-Service (OOS) criteria for commercial drivers (effective June 25, 2025). Simultaneously, FMCSA revised its policy and associated guidance outlining how law enforcement must assess a driver's ability to meet the federal ELP requirement. FMCSA's revised ELP policy sets forth a two-part roadside assessment for roadside enforcement to determine whether a driver's lack of English proficiency poses safety risks warranting OOS action including (1) a driver's ability to communicate effectively with enforcement officers (such as load contents, origin, and destination), and (2) read and interpret road signs, including dynamic message signs that display critical roadway safety advisories.

ATA supports FMCSA's clarification and revised ELP policy as a commonsense, safety-driven measure that upholds the principle that all drivers operating on U.S. roadways must be equipped with the necessary communication skills to respond in real-time to rapidly evolving roadway conditions,

enforcement directions, or emergency situations. In an April 2025 letter, ATA also urged DOT to improve tracking of CDL issuances, including non-domiciled CDLs.<sup>10</sup> We strongly support Secretary Duffy's initiative, announced in June, to audit state driver licensing agencies' practices regarding non-domicile CDL issuance to ensure that all commercial drivers on our nation's roadways are properly qualified and licensed. We urge the Subcommittee to support continued implementation of this policy and to complement these efforts with a broader, end-to-end commitment to ensuring that only safe, qualified commercial drivers—through rigorous training, testing, and enforcement—are permitted to operate on our nation's roadways.

### **Supporting Trucking Career Pathways and the Dignity of the Driver:**

The trucking industry, which serves as the backbone of our nation's economy and supply chain, continues to face driver shortages. Due to the recent freight recession, the driver shortage has been alleviated, but it has certainly not been eliminated. It is also important to note that even though the driver shortage may now be less severe than it was in 2022, the long-term causes of the driver shortage have not changed, and the industry fully expects the shortage to worsen when the freight market recovers. Over the next decade, trucking companies will need to hire roughly 1.2 million new drivers to keep pace with growing freight demand and an aging workforce.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, there is a diesel technician shortage in our industry. According to data from the TechForce Foundation, an estimated 41,000 additional diesel technicians were needed in 2022, including new positions for additional work, unfilled prior openings, and replacement of those leaving the position.<sup>12</sup> This shortage does not include the collision repair technicians, tire technicians, etc. that are also in demand. Long term, without additional skilled technicians to perform both regular and acute maintenance of trucks, our vehicles will be less safe and fuel efficient—and so will your automobiles.

These are good-paying, family-sustaining jobs that are not accompanied with the same debt that often comes with a college degree. The vast majority of diesel technicians make \$50,000-\$80,000 per year in base salary plus bonuses.<sup>13</sup> Truck drivers make good salaries too, with truckload drivers earning a median salary of \$76,420 per year according to a 2023 ATA industry survey.<sup>14</sup> This is a nearly 10% increase over the two preceding years.<sup>15</sup> That same study found linehaul less-than-truckload (LTL) drivers earning a median salary of \$94,525 in 2023,<sup>16</sup> and local LTL drivers earning a median salary of \$80,680.<sup>17</sup> Drivers who choose to become independent contractors earn even more than those averages, while enjoying the opportunity to set their own schedules, choose the routes they run, and grow their

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<sup>10</sup> "Spear, Chris. April 10, 2025. Letter to Secretary of Transportation Sean Duffy. Available online at: [https://www.trucking.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/ATA\\_DOT%20April%202025%20Enforcement%20and%20CDL%20issuance%20FINAL4-10-25.pdf](https://www.trucking.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/ATA_DOT%20April%202025%20Enforcement%20and%20CDL%20issuance%20FINAL4-10-25.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> *ATA Driver Shortage Update 2022*. American Trucking Associations, October 25, 2022. Available online at: [https://ata.msgfocus.com/files/amf\\_highroad\\_solution/project\\_2358/ATA\\_Driver\\_Shortage\\_Report\\_2022\\_Executive\\_Summary.October22.pdf](https://ata.msgfocus.com/files/amf_highroad_solution/project_2358/ATA_Driver_Shortage_Report_2022_Executive_Summary.October22.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> ATA works with TechForce to track the technicians needs of the industry. TechForce's report on national technician needs is available upon request. The Committee can contact them through their website: <https://techforce.org/>.

<sup>13</sup> *The State of Diesel Mechanics*, Randall Reilly/Shell Lubricant Solutions, 2022, at 12 (copy available upon request from <https://www.randallreilly.com/>).

<sup>14</sup> *Driver Compensation Study: Operations Data 2023*, American Trucking Associations, p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 66.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 67.

own businesses. ATA strongly supports the protection of the independent contractor business model that is at the heart of the trucking industry.

Relatedly, it is vitally important that Congress provide the skilled trades with the same access to financial resources and flexibility as are afforded to traditional four-year colleges and institutions. ATA was grateful for strong bipartisan support of the *Freedom to Invest in Tomorrow's Workforce Act*, which allows individuals to use 529 funds to pay for training to become truck drivers or diesel mechanics, as well as various measures to enable the use of short-term Pell Grants for these programs. We were also grateful to see those measures enacted in the *One Big Beautiful Bill Act*.

Looking ahead, we want to work with champions of the industry on both sides of the aisle to build upon this success and work toward parity in terms of the financial resources and options available for the skilled trades compared to traditional colleges and universities. ATA strongly supports establishing apprenticeships that will help new drivers enter the industry and receive valuable training. For this reason, we have endorsed bills such as the bipartisan, bicameral *Veterans Transition to Trucking Act* and are grateful to members of Congress, including members of the Commerce Committee, for their leadership in advocating for robust apprenticeship programs.

Reducing financial barriers to entry will certainly help the trucking industry recruit the next generation of safe truck drivers. ATA also strongly supports passage of the bipartisan *LICENSE Act*, which would reduce burdensome red tape and outdated barriers to obtaining a CDL by codifying DOT waivers issued under both Presidents Trump and Biden with no findings of adverse safety impacts.

#### *Safe Driver Apprenticeship Pilot Program*

The IIJA directed the DOT to establish the Safe Driver Apprenticeship Pilot Program (SDAP) to provide a pathway for 18-, 19-, and 20-year-old drivers to gain the knowledge, skills, and expertise to drive safely in interstate commerce. The SDAP was modeled after the apprenticeship program originally outlined in the *DRIVE Safe Act* and requires apprentices to complete 400 hours of on-duty time with an experienced driver, meet 13 performance benchmarks, and operate vehicles with five industry-leading safety technologies, including an active braking collision mitigation system and a forward-facing video event capture system. The pilot program was designed to provide a level of safety far beyond what is currently required for similarly aged individuals to obtain their CDLs and drive intrastate to demonstrate that, with the appropriate education, training, and safety technology, 18-, 19-, and 20-year-old drivers can operate safely in interstate commerce.

While ATA was enthusiastic about the prospects for this highly anticipated and widely supported pilot program, DOT's problematic implementation of the SDAP irreparably stunted participation and deterred younger drivers from considering this career pathway. DOT added two additional requirements not found in law as a condition of participation. These included a requirement that participating motor carriers be part of a Department of Labor (DOL)-approved Registered Apprenticeship Program to be eligible, and a requirement that participating motor carriers utilize driver-facing inward cameras, another safety technology beyond the five safety technologies already required. Importantly, the latter requirement was added almost eight months after the enactment of the IIJA and just before the pilot program was launched. The last-minute changes caused many motor carriers to decline participation in the program altogether. This egregious overstep necessitated Congressional action, which was signed by the President, to prohibit DOT from imposing its unnecessary, additional conditions for participation.

Unfortunately, by the time DOT was forced to restore SDAP back to its original intent, the pilot program was nearly at the halfway point to the three-year sunset, and the damage had already been done.



The short duration of the pilot program and the associated lack of permanence has deterred motor carriers from undergoing the onerous and costly process to adjust internal operations and become eligible for SDAP participation. Motor carriers have also cited challenges with securing insurance for potential apprentices. At this point, with just a few months remaining before the sunset of the SDAP, DOT's latest data for the fourth quarter of 2024 show that only 68 apprentices have applied, and 36 have completed the probationary periods.<sup>18</sup> I would note that 59 motor carriers and 139 experienced drivers (trainers) have been approved to participate.<sup>19</sup> If given more time, these carriers and experienced drivers would have the opportunity to train more apprentices. In total, apprentices have driven over 1,250,000 miles and over 23,500 hours safely in interstate commerce.<sup>20</sup> Importantly, according to the latest data reported by DOT, no apprentices in the pilot have been involved in a reportable crash.

While participation fell short of the 3,000-concurrent participant cap, the data generated from this pilot program demonstrates what the trucking industry knows to be true: that with rigorous safety and training guardrails, 18-, 19-, and 20-year-old drivers can operate safely in interstate commerce. Several of our members have utilized SDAP and are enthusiastic supporters of it. They have found the program to be a valuable component of their overall workforce development efforts, and the SDAP program has made a significant difference in the lives of these apprentices.

Importantly, the SDAP will sunset in November 2025, and apprentices who are in the process of completing the program will unfortunately have to forfeit the progress they've made toward the ability to operate in interstate commerce. We urge this Subcommittee, and DOT, to consider extending the sunset of the SDAP until a more permanent solution can be enacted through the upcoming surface transportation reauthorization. A permanent pathway to fulfilling careers will help the trucking industry recruit the next generation of talented, safe drivers and will help address the pervasive driver shortage.

#### Ensuring Bathroom Access

Truck drivers are the heartbeat of our economy and critical to supply chain continuity. When they stop for pickups or deliveries—which can take hours on end while the truck waits to be loaded or unloaded—drivers should have access to restroom facilities. Such basic accommodations are more than just common courtesy; this is about ensuring the dignity of drivers and supporting the men and women who do the heavy lifting to provide for everyone in this country. Guaranteeing restroom access would address a major barrier to retaining and recruiting more truck drivers, particularly women.

ATA is thankful for the bipartisan introduction of a bill in the House of Representatives that will confront this challenge faced by professional truck drivers: H.R. 2514, the *Trucker Bathroom Access Act*. The legislation requires shipper and receiver facilities to make existing employee restrooms available to truck drivers. We would be grateful for bipartisan support for this issue in the Senate as well, potentially for introducing a standalone measure and considering it during the upcoming surface transportation reauthorization. We look forward to working with you to ensure that drivers' most basic needs are met while they do the important work of delivering the nation's goods.

#### Expanding Truck Parking Capacity

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<sup>18</sup> Safe Driver Apprenticeship Pilot Program, Quarterly Program Update, End of Fourth Quarter 2024, Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. Available online at [https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/sites/fmcsa.dot.gov/files/2025-02/SDAP%204Q-2024\\_.pdf](https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/sites/fmcsa.dot.gov/files/2025-02/SDAP%204Q-2024_.pdf) (accessed July 16, 2025).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Safe Driver Apprenticeship Pilot Program, Program Committee Briefing, Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, April 11, 2023.

Another barrier to supply chain efficiency is the ongoing, well-documented shortage of safe truck parking. As with prohibitions in accessing bathrooms while on the job, the nationwide shortage of safe, secure, well-lit areas to park a truck overnight is a huge disincentive for workers—particularly women, who currently make up only 7% of truck drivers—from entering careers in trucking. In 2015, the Federal Highway Administration’s (FHWA) *Jason’s Law* report acknowledged the shortage of truck parking capacity as a serious highway safety concern. The FHWA found that more than 75% of truck drivers and almost 66% of logistics personnel “regularly [experienced] problems with finding safe parking locations when rest was needed.”<sup>21</sup> Due to inaction at the federal, state, and local levels, the truck parking shortage has only worsened since 2015. In its 2019 update to the *Jason’s Law* report, the FHWA found that the percentage of drivers who regularly had trouble finding truck parking had skyrocketed from 75% to 98%.<sup>22</sup> This is not only a public safety issue and problem for drivers on the road today, it also represents an enormous challenge to recruiting a new generation of drivers (including women and other traditionally underrepresented demographics) to enter the industry.

Sustained and robust federal investment in the expansion of truck parking capacity is key to addressing this longstanding problem. ATA supports the *Truck Parking Safety Improvement Act*, which would establish a competitive discretionary grant program and dedicate \$755 million for truck parking projects across the country.

### **Protect Our Supply Chains:**

The upcoming surface transportation reauthorization is also a chance to address issues which have caused increasing challenges since the enactment of the IIJA. As the Subcommittee is aware, there has been a dramatic rise in the incidence of cargo theft and freight fraud, which is disruptive to our supply chains and which will require new tools and coordination at the federal level to combat organized crime. Additionally, ATA supports the clarification that states are prohibited from superseding National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) standards for motor vehicle safety.

#### **Cargo Theft and Freight Fraud**

ATA is grateful to the Subcommittee for beginning a larger discussion about the substantial impacts of cargo theft on the trucking industry and our nation’s supply chains with its hearing in February. That hearing provided a platform for a trucking executive to share his personal experience as a victim of cargo theft and fraud, and he highlighted the vulnerabilities of FMCSA’s registration system, as well as the critical downstream impacts of those vulnerabilities. Moreover, the witness also used his time to encourage the Subcommittee to exercise robust oversight as the agency takes steps to upgrade its registration system and implement enhanced identify verification processes to further bolster security and deter bad actors.

ATA was encouraged by Chairman Young’s publication of an op-ed titled, “*Cargo Theft is a Growing National Security Issue*,” following the hearing and wholeheartedly agrees with his assessment that Congress must “examine and reconcile potential catalysts that allow criminals to steal cargo, modernize and implement safeguards for businesses and consumers, and ensure our law enforcement agencies are adequately prepared and equipped to respond to reports of wrongdoing.” This Subcommittee is well-positioned to ensure that DOT engages in an “all-hands-on-deck” approach by coordinating with other

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<sup>21</sup> *Jason’s Law Truck Parking Survey Results and Comparative Analysis*. Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation, August 2015.

<sup>22</sup> *Jason’s Law Commercial Motor Vehicle Parking Survey and Comparative Assessment Presentation*. Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation, December 2020.

appropriate federal agencies, law enforcement, and the private sector to combat the organized theft groups (OTGs) and transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) who are currently exploiting our domestic supply chains. Relatedly, Chairman Cruz announced at a full Committee hearing last week that he is currently drafting legislation to help DOT combat cargo theft and rampant fraud, and we greatly appreciate his attention to this complex issue.

Furthermore, we are grateful that the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation has already taken an important first step toward providing FMCSA with the necessary tools, resources, and authorities to protect the trucking industry and consumers from fraud by approving the *Household Goods Shipping Consumer Protection Act* (S. 337). Specifically, this bill restores FMCSA's ability to impose civil penalties against unauthorized brokers and other bad actors, allowing the agency to act swiftly in meting out penalties. The bipartisan legislation gives states the ability to use federal funds to enforce consumer protection laws and root out fraudulent actors before they strike. The *Household Goods Shipping Consumer Protection Act* is a critical element of a broader federal response to freight fraud, and we hope that Congress advances it expeditiously.

#### *Strengthening NHTSA's Role in Setting Industry Standards*

Under existing law—going back to the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966, Pub. L. 89-563—when NHTSA promulgates a federal motor vehicle safety standard, states are prohibited from issuing standards of their own on that same subject (see 49 U.S.C. § 30103(b)(1)). Congress has charged NHTSA with promulgating “practicable,” “objective” standards that “meet the need for motor vehicle safety,” (see 49 U.S.C. § 30111(a)). Allowing states to promulgate their own equipment standards when NHTSA has acted undermines that decision.

However, current law contains an exception that threatens to swallow the rule: it expressly provides that compliance with a NHTSA standard does not preempt “liability at common law” (see 49 U.S.C. § 30103(e)). This invites legal uncertainty, undermines Congressional intent to empower NHTSA to promulgate nationally uniform motor vehicle safety standards, and threatens supply chain integrity. Given that the trucking industry operates in all 50 states and that the market for motor vehicles is national in scope, we strongly support NHTSA's role as the primary authority over motor vehicle safety standards and urge Congress to reaffirm that role.

#### **Ensure Long-Term American Leadership:**

IJA was the largest investment in our nation's supply chain infrastructure in nearly a century and represented a concrete effort to ensure America's global economic leadership. As the Subcommittee looks towards the 2026 reauthorization, we would be remiss not to highlight additional opportunities to build on that investment moving forward and to make sure that federal regulatory leadership and resource allocations are focused on a long-term strategy that will keep our economy growing for years to come.

#### *Federal Leadership in Autonomous Technology Development:*

As mentioned before, America's truck drivers are the unsung heroes of our supply chain; they are the trucking industry's greatest asset. The groundbreaking developments in autonomous vehicle (AV) technologies offer opportunities to help improve the safety and productivity of those individuals, and to make trucking a safer and more welcoming profession for the next generation of truck drivers. New autonomous technologies do not mean that all vehicles will become “driverless vehicles” and that truck driving jobs will be eliminated. The reality is more nuanced.

Given the variety of freight movement—including liquids, livestock, hazardous material, large construction equipment, and oversize loads—and the variety of road, terrain, and weather conditions throughout the country, there will continue to be a role and need for drivers as part of a logistics system that includes automated trucks. ATA believes that automated trucks will be a tool that will help improve the efficiency of freight movements and help address the persistent shortage of drivers, *not* replace them. Driver responsibilities may adjust over time with deployment of automated technologies, but the industry will continue to need drivers, our greatest asset.

The trucking industry has a substantial stake in the enhancements to road safety that automated and connected vehicle technology will provide. America's roads and bridges are truck drivers' workplace, and safety is paramount. The safety gains achieved by removing human error—as well as the additional economic and societal benefits—are very enticing to an industry that already spends billions of dollars annually on safety, including technology enhancements, to ensure that drivers and passengers of all vehicles make it safely to their destination.

ATA will continue to advocate for a strong federal framework for automated vehicle testing and deployment. Such a federal framework is critical for ensuring the safety and trust of the public and necessary for testing the efficacy of automated vehicles in interstate commerce. A federal framework also provides clear paths for new and innovative technologies to move from testing to deployment through established DOT processes. This can include exemptions, interpretations, investigations, or data requirements designed to ensure safety and build public trust.

We encourage Congress and federal agencies to develop proactive policies that will foster innovation and ensure that America does not fall behind its global competitors in the development of this important technology. AVs and automated driving system (ADS) deployment have the potential to significantly enhance the safety, efficiency, and productivity of the U.S. freight and logistics systems. We have an opportunity to ensure that the technologies and vehicles that generate those benefits are developed, improved, implemented, and sold around the world by American companies.

#### Supporting Deregulatory Efforts:

As the nation's largest representative of motor carriers and motor carrier suppliers, ATA strongly supports the Trump Administration's efforts to ensure a regulatory environment that appropriately prioritizes reducing undue burdens and costs on motor carriers without compromising strong safety regulatory protections. Regulated entities, including motor carriers, rely on thoughtful, well-written, and safety-driven federal regulations and guidance to ensure the utmost safety for commercial drivers and all who share the road. However, ATA recognizes that certain federal rules and regulations that affect the trucking industry are redundant, outdated, or place undue burden on members of the trucking industry—in some cases, invoking compliance merely for compliance's sake rather than a material benefit to the industry or national interest. ATA applauds this Administration and DOT's efforts to swiftly review and take deregulatory action to existing rules, regulations, and guidance that remove unnecessary red tape and regulatory burdens and promote industry efficiency without harming safety.

As part of these efforts, in May 2025, ATA offered numerous targeted deregulatory recommendations to DOT and OMB aimed at aligning federal regulations with modern technology, operational realities, and safety priorities—many of which the Administration has already acted on. ATA urged DOT to eliminate outdated or burdensome requirements that no longer contribute to highway safety. These include repealing the rear underride guard certification label mandate under 49 CFR 393.86, which creates unnecessary costs for carriers without measurable safety benefits, and updating roadside warning device

requirements (49 CFR 393.95(f)) to support vehicle-integrated lighting systems—particularly for autonomous vehicles—rather than relying on driver-deployed warning triangles. ATA also called for revisions to hazmat railroad crossing rules (49 CFR 392.10–392.11) that require all stops regardless of risk level, and for the repeal of legacy trailer marking rules (49 CFR 393.13) that apply to equipment no longer in service. ATA also urged DOT and FMCSA to modernize Electronic Logging Device (ELD) related rules by allowing digital access to required documents and removing unnecessary paper log backup requirements (49 CFR 395.8(k)(1) and 395.22(h)). Moreover, ATA recommended making permanent existing exemptions for simplified ELD use during yard moves, eliminating manual logging requirements that add administrative burden without enhancing safety. Additional reforms included eliminating the 15-day roadside inspection report return requirement (49 CFR 396.9), modernizing CDL/CLP testing rules to improve workforce entry, and rescinding broker transaction transparency requirements (49 CFR 371.3(c)) that conflict with market principles and fall outside FMCSA’s safety mandate.

While ATA supports regulatory reform, we strongly urge Congress and DOT to preserve proven, safety-enhancing regulations that, if eliminated, would materially and consequentially impact highway safety for all road users. Among these critical regulations is the ELD mandate, which has delivered measurable reductions in hours-of-service (HOS) violations and crash rates since implementation. Repealing or weakening this mandate, which has been requested by some industry stakeholders, would be a step back for the industry as ELDs modernize compliance monitoring and enforcement without altering rest requirements. We also emphasize that any future changes to the underlying HOS rules, upon which ELD rules are predicated, must be grounded in data and scientific research. Similarly, as previously mentioned, ATA supports continued advancement of life-saving technologies like AEB and opposes efforts that would slow or reverse progress on drug and alcohol testing reforms. In all cases, regulatory streamlining must not come at the expense of highway safety, and we commend DOT and FMCSA’s approach to sound, practical deregulatory action.

#### Addressing Critical Freight Bottlenecks

Infrastructure investments must be made in ways that benefit highway system efficiency, lower supply chain costs, and ensure the competitiveness of American businesses with global supply chain partners. ATA strongly supports investments that will reduce freight congestion at key bottlenecks and encourage the efficient movement of goods at our nation’s intermodal gateways.

Highway congestion, for example, added nearly \$109 billion to the cost of freight transportation in 2022—a 15% increase year-over-year.<sup>23</sup> In 2022, truck drivers sat in traffic for 1.2 billion hours, equivalent to more than 435,000 drivers sitting idle for a year.<sup>24</sup> This caused the trucking industry to consume an additional 6.4 billion gallons of fuel, resulting in the release of 65.4 million metric tons of additional carbon dioxide emissions.<sup>25</sup>

ATA recommends that the next surface transportation bill bolster discretionary funding programs to ensure that they address major freight bottlenecks. ATRI annually identifies the top 100 freight bottlenecks nationwide, and the trucking industry suggests that DOT prioritize these locations for maintenance and improvement.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Cost of Congestion to the Trucking Industry: 2024 Update*. American Transportation Research Institute, Dec. 2024.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Top 100 Bottlenecks – 2024*. American Transportation Research Institute, 2024.

Another contributing factor to supply chain bottlenecks and efficiency is the poor state of freight intermodal connectors—the roads that connect ports, rail yards, airports and other multimodal facilities to the National Highway System. Despite their vital role in the freight distribution network and the economy, these connectors are often neglected and fail to receive needed investments. Currently, only 9% of intermodal connectors are in good or very good condition, 19% are in mediocre condition, and a troubling 37% are rated in poor condition.<sup>27</sup> Not only do deteriorating roads damage both the vehicles and the freight they carry, but FHWA found a correlation between poor roads and vehicle speed. Average speed on a connector in poor condition was 22% lower than on connectors in fair or better condition.<sup>28</sup> FHWA further found that congestion on freight intermodal connectors causes 1,059,238 hours of truck delay annually and 12,181,234 hours of automobile delay.<sup>29</sup> Congestion on freight intermodal connectors adds over \$96 million to freight transportation costs each year.<sup>30</sup>

One possible reason connectors are neglected is that the vast majority of these roads (70%) are under the jurisdiction of a local or county government.<sup>31</sup> Too often, these roads serve critical roles in regional, national, and international commerce beyond the geographic boundaries of the jurisdictions that have responsibility for them, but those broader interests may not be factored into the local jurisdictions' spending decisions. While intermodal connectors are eligible for federal funding, this is simply not good enough. ATA supports a set-aside of funding for freight intermodal connectors to ensure that these critical arteries are given the attention and resources they deserve.

#### Prioritizing Projects That Improve Freight Mobility

Although the IIJA did not set aside funding for either highway bottleneck elimination or intermodal connectors, these projects are eligible for funding under several of the discretionary programs. Congress should ensure that the resources available from these important programs are used primarily for projects that improve transportation safety and mobility, as well as projects that address infrastructure deficiencies that contribute to supply chain inefficiencies. These programs should not be used to advance parochial agendas that are outside of their Congressionally mandated scope. Nor should Congress further divert funding from highway projects. Highways carry the vast majority of people and freight, and unlike some modes, including freight railroads, highway users cannot directly invest in their transportation infrastructure. They must instead rely on government agencies to effectively invest their user fee revenue in projects that improve roadway safety and efficiency. Using this money to subsidize other transportation modes breaks the trust and the implied agreement that users place in their elected officials to invest in projects that are directly beneficial to motorists.

#### Providing Consistent, Sustainable Funding

Underpinning all these recommendations is the need for a long-term, stable revenue source for the Highway Trust Fund (HTF) to support investments in our roads and bridges. This revenue source should be paid for equitably by *all road users*, including those that do not currently contribute to the HTF. The trucking industry is the leading payer to the HTF, contributing almost half of all revenues while representing less than 5% of road users. While the trucking industry is proud to pay our fair share, Congressional attention and action is necessary to ensure a lasting, viable, and equitable revenue source for continued infrastructure investments.

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<sup>27</sup> *Freight Intermodal Connectors Study*. Federal Highway Administration, April 2017.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *An Analysis of the Operational Costs of Trucking: 2025 Update*. American Transportation Research Institute, July 2025.. Estimates average truck operational cost of \$90.89 per hour.

<sup>31</sup> *Freight Intermodal Connectors Study*. Federal Highway Administration, April 2017.

Federal fuel taxes, which are the primary funding sources for the HTF, have not increased since 1993. If Congress will not act to increase those taxes, or even index them for inflation, then alternative solutions that account for new engine technologies must be enacted in a way that ensures the burden of maintaining our highways is allocated fairly and sustainably for future generations. ATA recommends a user-pay solution to the HTF shortfall that adheres to the following principles:

- **Reasonably Uniform Application:** Apply uniformly across various classes of highway users to ensure fairness.
- **Verifiable Metrics:** Base the system primarily on measurable and easily verifiable factors, such as highway and vehicle use.
- **Evasion Prevention:** Minimize opportunities for tax or fee evasion to maintain revenue integrity.
- **Administrative Simplicity:** Ensure the system is cost-effective and straightforward for the government to administer, collect, and enforce, without imposing excessive administrative or record-keeping burdens on highway users.
- **Commerce-Friendly:** Avoid creating barriers or inefficiencies that hinder interstate commerce.

Identifying a long-term, sustainable solution for HTF revenues can also provide flexibility to ultimately relieve trucking of the burden of the century-old, 12% federal excise tax on heavy-duty trucks and trailers. Initially implemented as a 3% tax to offset the cost of American participation in World War I, this tax has grown to be one of the highest excise taxes on any good in the United States. As it adds over \$20,000 to the cost of a new \$180,000 truck and \$6,000 to the cost of a new \$50,000 trailer, this onerous charge creates a disincentive to putting new equipment that is cleaner and safer than ever before on our nation's highways.

Meanwhile, at the state level, the absence of sufficient funding from user fees has led states to increasingly turn to tolls to fund infrastructure projects. Unfortunately, there appears to be a growing trend that places this burden disproportionately and unfairly on the trucking industry through the misuse of tolls. A recent court decision in Rhode Island legalized truck-only tolls, allowing the state to reinstate tolls solely on tractor-trailers, which represent just 3% of vehicles on the tolled facilities. In Manhattan, trucks must pay a toll every time they cross 60<sup>th</sup> Street, while cars pay only once per day. As these anti-truck tolling arrangements spread, the price will be borne by consumers due to higher supply chain costs. We urge Congress to reform federal Interstate tolling authority to prevent these types of abuses.

### **In Conclusion:**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the 8.5 million people in trucking-related jobs who power our nation's supply chains and keep the wheels of the economy turning. Surface transportation reauthorization in the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress is a potentially transformational opportunity for our country. The ATA looks forward to supporting your efforts to improve the safe and efficient movement of freight across our nation and to encourage economic growth.

Thank you again for your leadership on these vital issues.