

CLIENT ALERT

Congress Moves Forward on Bipartisan Autonomous Vehicle Bill

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On October 28, 2019, the House and Senate circulated draft legislative text for three sections of an autonomous vehicle bill. The three address federal advisory committees, AV testing expansions, and exemptions to allow for vehicles with novel designs. House and Senate committee staff emphasize that this was only a first cut, indicating there would be more to follow.

This announcement follows a request of the House Energy & Commerce Committee and Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee, in August of this year, for input from interested stakeholders on what the bill should address. In response, the Committees received letters from well over 100 organizations, including developers in the industry, nonprofits, and disability advocates.

This development follows the failed bills SELF DRIVE in the House (HR 3388) and AV START in the Senate (S. 1886). These bills would have established a unified federal framework for AV safety and set timelines for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to publish safety standards for AVs – neither of which exist today.

Congress's proposed legislation would enable automakers the option to manufacture vehicles without traditional components, such as steering wheels, brake pedals, and so forth, so long as the Department of Transportation exempts them from the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards. DOT is in the midst of considering its own regulatory changes, as it recently requested comments for its proposed rule on "Safe Integration of Automated Driving Systems-Equipped Commercial Motor Vehicles" DOT asked autonomous vehicle developers for comment on the regulatory hurdles they face with Vehicle Safety Standards as they stand today, and challenges they face in testing and complying with crash avoidance standards, especially in autonomous vehicles that lack traditional manual controls.

Several states have also put forth their own AV bills.

Many observers hope Congress's new bill will create comprehensive federal and regulatory policy governing AV deployment and advancement. Having agreed standards would be a game changer for stakeholders and developers in their race to automation.

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