



## Department of Transportation releases comprehensive plan regarding autonomous vehicles

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The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) released an update to the agency's policy regarding autonomous vehicles on January 11, 2021. The policy, the [Automated Vehicles Comprehensive Plan](#) (The Plan), builds on three previous policy statements released during the Trump administration: "[Automated Driving Systems 2.0: A Vision for Safety](#)" (ADS 2.0) released in September 2017; "[Preparing for the Future of Transportation: Automated Vehicles 3.0](#)" (AV 3.0) released in October 2018; and "[Ensuring American Leadership in Automated Technologies: Automated Vehicles 4.0](#)" (AV 4.0) released in February 2020. The Plan provides an outline of the agency's ongoing and forthcoming plans for integrating automated driving systems (ADS) and autonomous technology into the wider transportation system.

The Plan is organized around three major goals to help the agency achieve its vision for autonomous vehicles, each of which includes a discussion of key objectives and concrete actions the agency is taking to accomplish those objectives, including new rule-makings, funding efforts, and pilot programs. These guiding goals are:

- **Promote collaboration and transparency.** The Plan notes that DOT has convened working groups, government and industry stakeholders, and thought leaders to monitor trends, issues, and needs relevant to the deployment of automated vehicles. Under this goal, DOT also notes it plans to continue providing guidance to stakeholders (including its previous policy statements) and to facilitate information sharing through voluntary safety self-assessments, workshops on safe testing on public roads, and publishing reports on bus and delivery vehicle automation. Relatedly, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) announced this week that it would expand its [Automated Vehicle Transparency and Engagement for Safe Testing \(AV TEST\) Initiative](#) from a pilot to a full program. Under the AV TEST program, NHTSA gathers information voluntarily submitted by states and companies about automated vehicles and related testing operations and presents the information to the public in an interactive online tool.
- **Modernize the regulatory environment.** DOT notes that it has several active and planned rule-makings regarding removing unnecessary regulatory barriers to autonomous vehicle deployment and streamlining the process for issuing exemptions. Specifically, the Plan highlighted a notice of proposed rule-making issued in March 2020 amending

crashworthiness regulations for autonomous vehicles; a November 2020 proposed rule regarding creating a safety framework for assessing autonomous vehicles; and upcoming rule changes regarding telltales, indicators, and warning signals and autonomous delivery vehicles without passenger compartments. The Plan also notes that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) will be proposing a new regulation allowing domestic entities to request exemptions to operate their nonconforming vehicles on public roads for purposes of research, demonstration, and more – an option previously limited to imported vehicles. Finally, the Plan suggests that NHTSA may be considering establishing a new set of regulatory requirements specific to classes of specialized motor vehicles equipped with autonomous technology.

- **Prepare the transportation system.** Pursuant to this goal, DOT will engage in targeted research and provide funding opportunities for ADS-focused demonstrations, pilot programs and deployments. For example, the Plan highlights the Secretary of Transportation's Automated Driving System Demonstration Grants – US\$60 million in federal funding provided to eight programs in seven states to support planning, direct research, and demonstration grants. The Plan also notes DOT will pursue infrastructure updates to ensure that traffic control devices such as lane markings and signs can support safe interactions between ADS-equipped vehicles and the roadway infrastructure.

DOT's Plan reiterates the agency's commitment to technology neutrality, protecting intellectual property and data security, enhancing mobility and accessibility, promoting a consistent and coordinated approach to regulation, and above all prioritizing safety. Like *AV 4.0* and previous DOT guidance on autonomous vehicles, the Plan does not include any new, binding requirements for ADS vehicles or technology developers. However, the rule-makings announced and described in the Plan, along with the changing administration, provide ample opportunity for developers to weigh in on the rules that will be applicable to autonomous technology and vehicles in the future.

The Comprehensive Plan will be published in the *Federal Register* and will be available for public review and comment.

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