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NHTSA Official Urges House Committee to Stay the Course in Driverless Rulemaking

Cheryl Miller, The Recorder

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The nation's top highway safety official on Tuesday continued to tout proposed autonomous-vehicle rules even as the Obama administration prepares to hand power to a new president who has promised to slash federal regulations.

Mark Rosekind, administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, told the U.S. House Energy and Commerce Committee that federal agencies should continue playing a leading role in setting safety standards for manufacturers of self-driving cars.

The NHTSA in September unveiled a [set of industry guidelines](#), including a voluntary 15-point safety assessment for developers to follow in designing, testing and deploying autonomous vehicles.

"We have an industry that is rapidly developing innovative new technologies. And we have a government that is inspired and excited about the future of this technology," Rosekind said in [prepared remarks](#). "But that future is not without threats. Bad actors or bad incidents could threaten to derail our collective efforts."

Rosekind also quoted from an [op-ed](#) written by President Barack Obama shortly after the NHTSA policies were released, noting that "there are always those who argue that government should stay out of free enterprise entirely."

"The quickest way to slam the brakes on innovation is for the public to lose confidence in the safety of new technologies," Rosekind said, quoting Obama. "Both government and industry have a responsibility to make sure that doesn't happen."

The NHTSA's autonomous vehicle policies, now being vetted in a public comment period that lasts until Nov. 22, may be in jeopardy in a Trump administration. President-elect Donald Trump has offered no specifics on how, or if, he would regulate the fast-growing industry. Messages left with two Trump transition-team members working on transportation issues, Washington-based lobbyist Martin Whitmer Jr. and Shirley Ybarra, a senior transportation policy analyst at the Reason

Foundation, were not returned on Tuesday.

Trump has promoted the idea of mass road and highway construction. Trump's transition [website](#) says his administration will seek to invest \$550 billion into the nation's transportation network.

But the president-elect has also [said](#) that for every federal regulation that is enacted, two existing ones must be eliminated. Such comments may hold promise for groups that prefer a lighter government hand overseeing the autonomous vehicle industry. The Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, which represents 12 car and truck makers, asked Trump in a Nov. 10 [letter](#) first reported by Reuters to review all car-related regulatory actions taken by the Obama administration since Sept. 1, including NHTSA's proposed policies.

"Technology and change are swamping the regulatory capacity to manage our emerging reality," the letter said. "Reform is imperative."

In a separate [letter](#) to Trump, the Internet Association, whose members include Google Inc. and Uber Technologies Inc., said that "wholesale changes to regulatory models are not needed" in growing industries, including autonomous vehicles.

Any overhaul of federal regulations could have a significant impact in California, where state officials are [pursuing](#) their own rules on driverless car operations and testing in conjunction with the policies proposed by the Obama administration. Car manufacturers have criticized California's proposals as too restrictive and beyond the role set out for states by the federal guidance.

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