



February 19, 2026

Representative Ashley Carrick  
Co-Chair, House Transportation Committee  
State Capitol Room 406  
Juneau, AK 99801  
Phone: 907-465-4976

Representative Ted Eischeid  
Co-Chair, House Transportation Committee  
State Capitol Room 412  
Juneau, AK 99801  
Phone: 907-465-2095

Dear Co-Chairs Carrick and Eischeid and members of the House Transportation Committee,

The Autonomous Vehicle Industry Association (“AVIA”) writes to express our significant concerns with and strong opposition to HB 217. By requiring a human observer to be present in all autonomous vehicles (“AVs”) operated for commercial use, the bill would impede the ability of AV operators to bring the many benefits of AV technology to Alaska. For these reasons, we respectfully encourage the Committee to ***vote against HB 217***.

By way of background, AVIA is comprised of the world’s leading technology, ridesharing, trucking, and automotive companies. Our mission is to realize the benefits of AVs and support the safe and expeditious deployment of these technologies. Vehicles operated by AVIA members have driven more than [145 million autonomous miles](#) on public roads in the United States alone and have a tremendous safety record that is supported by data collected by the federal government.

**HB 217 would impose a permanent ban on the commercial operation of autonomous vehicles in Alaska.** A regulatory framework that supports the deployment of all AVs will better equip Alaska’s transportation system and workforce to take advantage of the benefits presented by this technology. Unfortunately, HB 217 jeopardizes this future by requiring a human observer in all AVs operated for commercial use, which would effectively ban commercial AV operations in Alaska in perpetuity.

**HB 217 would cause Alaska to fall behind other states on AV innovation.** The majority of states recognize the many benefits of AVs and authorize driverless AV operations, including for personal and commercial use. No state that authorizes AV deployment requires a human observer to remain in the vehicle. If Alaska were to move forward with this bill, it would become a national outlier.



**AVs will support road safety.** AVs have tremendous safety, mobility, and efficiency benefits, and the ongoing deployment of AVs is demonstrating how AVs will save lives and change the way we move. AV technology has been tested and deployed in states across the country and maintains an incredible safety record. Estimates from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration indicate that [nearly 40,000 traffic deaths](#) occurred in 2024, revealing a pattern of increasingly unsafe driving that is occurring across the country and reflecting an unacceptable status quo when it comes to safety on our roadways. Human behavior is a contributing factor to the overwhelming majority of crashes. Alaska should continue supporting AV operation because AVs are positioned to combat the trend of unsafe driving that has persisted for years on U.S. roads. AVs have unparalleled visibility of the world around them as a result of advanced technologies that work in concert to form the automated driving system. The combination of these systems leads to quicker decisions with many more inputs than a human driver. AVs also have a 360-degree field of vision which can detect, track, and react to objects and people even when they are hidden from human perception due to vehicles, buildings, and other obstructions. Importantly, unlike human drivers, AVs do not drive drunk, text while driving, fall asleep at the wheel, or recklessly speed.

**Autonomous trucks can mitigate supply chain challenges.** Autonomous trucks will also alleviate supply chain challenges and augment the current truck driver workforce. Federal government data estimates that U.S. freight volume will increase 50% by 2050. At the same time, there is a shortage of truck drivers to move this freight and the problem is set to get worse. Unfortunately, the U.S. trucking industry is currently short of an estimated 78,000 truck drivers due to a long-term decline in new drivers entering the profession, and an annual turnover rate exceeding 90%. The truck driver shortage is estimated to reach 160,000 in 2031. The United States needs truck drivers, and autonomous trucks can help augment the workforce to help solve supply chain challenges.

**Autonomous trucks will create new, high-quality jobs.** The AV industry is also leveraging the existing workforce to create new roles for different education and skill levels. Many of the jobs created do not require a college degree, such as service technicians, remote assistance operators, mapping data collectors, delivery packers, and more. Workers with experience in the trucking industry specifically, particularly as truck drivers, offer valuable skills to AV trucking employers. In addition, according to a study funded by the U.S. Department of Transportation and Federal Highway Administration, automating long-haul trucking will spur \$111 billion in aggregate investment spending across the U.S. economy, increase total U.S. employment by 26,400 to 35,100 jobs per year on average, and raise annual earnings for all U.S. workers by more than \$200 per worker per year.



**AVs will bring economic and environmental benefits.** In addition to offering safety, mobility, and workforce benefits, AVs are well positioned to reduce traffic congestion, improve environmental quality, and advance transportation efficiency. In particular, autonomous heavy-duty vehicles that operate in interstate commerce will increase the safety and efficiency of freight movement. According to a study funded by the U.S. Department of Transportation and Federal Highway Administration, automating long-haul trucking will spur \$111 billion in aggregate investment spending across the U.S. economy, increase total U.S. employment by 26,400 to 35,100 jobs per year on average, and raise annual earnings for all U.S. workers by more than \$200 per worker per year. AV technology also presents an array of environmental benefits, including greater fuel efficiency, more efficient use of physical infrastructure, reduced congestion, and reduced agricultural spoilage and related preservation of soil and water resources. Moreover, autonomous long-haul trucking has the potential to broadly benefit the economy by improving the efficiency of countless industries that rely on moving goods on trucks, such as agriculture, retail, and manufacturing.

AVs will usher in a new era of mobility that will make Alaska's transportation system safer and more efficient. We strongly believe Alaska should support safety-enhancing policies without foreclosing a future with AVs. For the reasons described above, we respectfully strongly oppose HB 217.

Sincerely,

Jeff Farrah  
Chief Executive Officer  
Autonomous Vehicle Industry Association