

Reason Foundation Comments on House Bill 217: Autonomous Vehicles

Prepared for: Members of the Senate Transportation Committee
Alaska State Senate

Prepared by: Marc Scribner, Senior Transportation Policy Analyst
Reason Foundation

Date: May 1, 2026



Dear Chair Bjorkman and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to offer our organization's perspective on House Bill (HB) 217 and autonomous vehicle regulation. My name is Marc Scribner, and I serve as senior transportation policy analyst at Reason Foundation. We provide pro bono consulting to public officials and stakeholders to help them design and implement policies related to transportation and infrastructure. I am also a member of the Transportation Research Board of the National Academies' Standing Technical Committee on Developments and Advancements in Transportation Technology Law.

Our assessment of HB 217 is based on my more than 15 years of research on the law and policy related to driving automation. We share the goal of ensuring the safe operation of automated driving systems on public roadways; however, we believe HB 217 is deficient in several key respects.

Even More Flawed than Failed California Legislation

Section 1 of HB 217 would prohibit the driverless operation of vehicles equipped with automated driving systems if those vehicles have gross vehicle weights of 10,001 pounds or more. This ban on driverless trucking is based on legislation introduced in California in 2023 (Assembly Bill 316) and 2024 (Assembly Bill 2286). In both cases, California's governor vetoed the bills, deeming them unnecessary and harmful to the state's reputation as a global leader in technological innovation. To date, no state has enacted a statutory ban on driverless trucks.

But HB 217 goes even further than the approach rejected in California. Section 1 would prohibit driverless operations of all vehicles engaged in commercial carriage of passengers and cargo. This would include light-duty on-demand passenger vehicles commonly called robotaxis that have logged more than 150 million miles on U.S. public roads in commercial service across 10 metropolitan areas. A commercial driverless vehicle ban of this expansive scope was introduced in Tennessee in 2025 (HB 1168/SB 310) and was rejected by both chambers. Following the defeat of these bills in Tennessee, leading robotaxi developer Waymo announced it was planning to launch commercial service in Nashville, which is currently undergoing pre-deployment testing.

Banning Autonomous Commercial Vehicles Won't Make Alaska Roads Safer



Reason Foundation is a national 501(c)(3) public policy research and education organization with expertise across a range of policy areas, including public sector pensions, technology, housing and land use, transportation, infrastructure, education, and criminal justice. For more information, visit reason.org.

The major advantage of automated driving systems is that they do not behave like typical human drivers. Automated driving systems cannot drive drunk, drugged, drowsy, or distracted, and are programmed to follow the rules of the road. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, human error or misbehavior is a critical factor in more than 90% of motor vehicle crashes.

Research by leading reinsurance company SwissRe and autonomous vehicle developer Waymo found that Waymo's automated driving system is already far safer when compared to a typical human driver. Their study analyzed 25.3 million fully autonomous miles driven by Waymo, along with 500,000 insurance claims and over 200 billion miles of driving exposure. Waymo and Swiss Re found that, when compared to human drivers, Waymo's automated driving system produced an 88% reduction in property damage claims and a 92% reduction in bodily injury claims.

It is worth noting that Alaska could benefit from safety-enhancing vehicle technology. According to Reason Foundation's 29th Annual Highway Report, Alaska had the worst rural highway fatality rate in the country at 1.99 fatalities per 100 million vehicle-miles, compared to the national average fatality rate of 1.25. To put this in perspective, Alaska's rural roads are 50 times more dangerous than those of the safest state, Maryland (0.04 fatalities per 100 million vehicle-miles).

A More Effective Path Forward

HB 217 could be improved by:

- Eliminating arbitrary operating restrictions based on use-case characteristics;
- Conforming more completely to the basic technology definitions contained in consensus technical standard SAE Recommended Practice J3016, *Taxonomy and Definitions for Terms Related to Driving Automation Systems for On-Road Motor Vehicles*;
- Incorporating first-responder interaction planning as described in the Automated Vehicle Safety Consortium's (AVSC) *Best Practice for First Responder Interactions with Fleet-Managed Automated Driving System-Dedicated Vehicles (ADS-DVs)* (AVSC-I-01-2024); and
- Amending Chapters 23 and 33 of Title 28 to incorporate automated driving systems and vehicles equipped with them into Alaska's existing statutory requirements on transportation network companies and commercial motor vehicles.

Thank you for your time. We welcome the opportunity to advise the legislature on this subject in the future.

Sincerely,

Marc Scribner
Senior Transportation Policy Analyst
Reason Foundation
marc.scribner@reason.org

