

Dear Member of Congress / Secretary of Transportation,

My name is Jonathan Wood. I am a professional truck driver from South Carolina, and I am writing to you with deep concern about the push toward autonomous commercial transportation, especially autonomous semi trucks.

I am asking you to oppose the autonomous trucking provisions in the BUILD America 250 Act and to stop allowing corporate profit to be disguised as public safety and innovation.

The sections of the BUILD America 250 Act that concern me most are in Title V, Subtitle E, called "Safe Integration of Autonomous Commercial Motor Vehicles." That subtitle may sound harmless, but it is the part of the bill that builds the federal pathway for autonomous commercial vehicles.

Section 5402 is especially concerning because it directs the Secretary of Transportation to create regulations for ADS-equipped commercial motor vehicles to operate in interstate commerce. That means this bill is not just studying autonomous trucks. It is laying the groundwork for them to run across state lines under a federal framework. It also applies to Level 3, Level 4, and Level 5 automated driving systems. Those are not simple driver-assist features. Level 4 and Level 5 automation are the levels that move toward vehicles operating without a human driver doing the driving task.

Section 5402 also allows manufacturers to meet the standard through a "safety case." That concerns me because the companies trying to profit from this technology would be able to argue, with their own evidence, that their system is safe enough. I do not believe corporate self-certification and polished safety claims should be enough to put an 80,000-pound driverless truck beside American families on public highways.

Section 5403 is also dangerous because it deals with federal preemption of state laws and regulations. In plain English, that could limit the ability of states to set stronger safety rules for autonomous commercial vehicles. If a state believes it needs tougher rules to protect its citizens, construction workers, first responders, school buses, or working drivers, Washington should not strip that power away just to create a smoother path for autonomous trucking companies.

Section 5404 gives regulatory flexibility for automated driving system technologies and equipment. Again, that may sound technical, but it is another example of the bill adjusting federal rules to accommodate this technology. Instead of asking how to protect drivers and the public first, the bill appears to be asking how to make the rules fit autonomous trucking.

Section 5406 creates a way to collect safety violations involving ADS-equipped commercial motor vehicles in the National Consumer Complaint Database. While reporting is important, this

also proves that Congress knows there will be complaints, violations, and safety problems to track. The public should not have to wait until after these vehicles are deployed to find out what went wrong.

Section 5407 is called “Commercial Motor Vehicle Workforce Development,” but to me it reads like an admission that this technology will disrupt workers. It talks about training people to operate and maintain ADS-equipped commercial vehicles and helping the current workforce adapt to new and emerging technologies. That does not replace a career. That does not protect a mortgage. That does not protect a family. Training a small number of workers for automation-related jobs is not the same as protecting millions of professional drivers and the communities that depend on them.

The bill also includes Section 6014, which calls for a GAO study on automated driving systems safety assurance and what infrastructure changes may be necessary for safe deployment. That raises a serious question: if Congress still needs a study to know what infrastructure changes are needed for safe deployment, why are we already building a federal framework to allow autonomous commercial vehicles on public highways?

These sections show that the BUILD America 250 Act is not just about roads, bridges, and infrastructure. It contains language that could help open the door to autonomous commercial trucking in interstate commerce. I am asking you to remove these provisions, slow this process down, and put American workers and public safety ahead of corporate profit.

Let’s be honest about what is happening. Autonomous trucking is not being pushed because corporations suddenly care more about safety than truck drivers do. It is being pushed because removing the driver removes the paycheck, the benefits, the home time, the worker protections, and the human being from the business model.

This is about profit.

The companies promoting autonomous trucks are not doing this to help working families. They are doing it because they see labor as a cost to eliminate. They see professional drivers as an expense on a spreadsheet. They want the public to believe this is progress, but for millions of American workers, this is not progress. It is replacement.

A semi truck is not a phone app. It is not a robot vacuum. It is an 80,000-pound commercial vehicle running beside families, school buses, construction workers, first responders, and everyday Americans. When something goes wrong at highway speed, the consequences are not theoretical. People die.

The public is being sold a polished story about sensors, cameras, radar, lidar, artificial intelligence, and “safer roads.” But anyone who actually lives on America’s highways knows the

real world is not a clean test track. Roads are messy. Weather changes fast. Lane markings disappear. Construction zones are confusing. Fog rolls in. Rain blinds cameras. Road spray covers sensors. Snow, ice, glare, dust, debris, tire smoke, and damaged signs create conditions that technology does not always handle the way a trained human driver can.

Truck drivers know this because we deal with it every single day.

A sensor does not understand fear in the eyes of a driver about to make a bad move. A sensor does not understand when a child might run near traffic. A sensor does not understand when a flagger is giving hand signals in a construction zone. A sensor does not feel the truck, hear the change in the tires, notice a strange vibration, or understand that something is wrong before a warning light comes on.

A professional driver does.

These companies advertise autonomous technology like it is nearly perfect, but the truth is these systems still struggle in real-world conditions. Cameras can be blinded. Radar can be confused. Lidar can be affected by weather and obstruction. Mapping can be outdated. Software can fail. Communications can be interrupted. Sensors can get dirty, damaged, frozen, blocked, or misread the environment. And when the system fails, who pays the price? Not the CEO. Not the investor. Not the lobbyist. The price is paid by the family in the minivan, the worker in the construction zone, the trooper on the shoulder, and the truck driver whose profession is being destroyed.

This is why Congress should not accept industry promises at face value.

The same corporations telling us autonomous trucking is safe are the same corporations that stand to save billions by eliminating drivers. That is a conflict of interest. The people who profit from removing drivers should not be trusted to define what "safe enough" means for the American public.

The BUILD America 250 Act should be about rebuilding America, not replacing the American worker. It should not become a back door for tech companies, mega carriers, and investors to put driverless semi trucks on public highways before the public has had a real voice in the decision.

If autonomous trucks are allowed to spread across the country, the damage will not stop with truck drivers. Truck stops, repair shops, diners, hotels, small towns, dispatchers, warehouse workers, mechanics, and countless supporting jobs will all feel the impact. And when displaced drivers are forced into other industries, wages will be pushed down for workers who never thought autonomous trucking had anything to do with them.

That is how the working class gets squeezed from every direction.

We are constantly told that displaced workers can be retrained. But retrained into what? Lower-paying jobs? Short-term programs? Remote monitoring jobs that may eventually be automated too? A workforce-development paragraph in a bill does not replace a career. It does not replace a mortgage payment. It does not replace dignity. It does not replace the pride of doing honest work and providing for a family.

Congress should not allow corporations to destroy stable careers and then call it innovation.

During COVID, truck drivers were called heroes. We kept this country moving when everything else was shut down. We hauled food, medicine, fuel, medical supplies, and the freight that kept families, hospitals, grocery stores, and businesses alive. We slept in trucks, ate wherever we could, dealt with closed facilities, long waits, health risks, and uncertainty while America depended on us.

Now, some of the same leaders and corporations who called drivers “essential” are standing by while technology is being pushed to replace us. That is wrong. If truck drivers were heroes when the country needed us, then now it is time for this country to protect the drivers who protected America.

Drivers helped save this country during COVID. Now it is time to save the drivers you once called heroes.

Before any autonomous commercial motor vehicle is allowed to operate on public highways, I believe Congress should require:

A qualified CDL driver inside the vehicle at all times.

Full public crash reporting and safety data.

Independent testing not controlled by the companies trying to profit from the technology.

Strict cybersecurity standards.

Clear liability so corporations cannot hide behind software, contractors, or blame-shifting.

Real-world testing in rain, snow, fog, mountains, construction zones, heavy traffic, rural roads, emergency scenes, and poor road conditions.

A full economic impact study on truck drivers, wages, small businesses, and working-class communities.

Strong worker protections before any federal framework moves forward.

The American people should not be used as test subjects for corporate automation. Public highways belong to the public. They do not belong to Silicon Valley, Wall Street, tech lobbyists, or mega carriers looking to cut labor costs.

I am asking you to stand up for American workers and highway safety. Do not let the BUILD America 250 Act become the bill that helped replace professional truck drivers with machines.

America was not built by algorithms. It was built by workers.

Respectfully,

Jonathan Wood
Professional Truck Driver
South Carolina