



PROTECTING YOUR
RIGHT TO ROAM

February 10th, 2026

RE: HB4085

Dear House Committee on Transportation,

My name is Zachary Lauritzen from Oregon Walks, a pedestrian advocacy organization.

Autonomous vehicles hold significant promise for our transportation system because they have the potential to eliminate many of the most dangerous aspects of human driving. They are not drunk or high. They are not angry or aggressive. They are not distracted by phones, screens, or passengers, and they do not drive while tired. Autonomous vehicles can be programmed never to speed, to obey traffic laws consistently, and to behave predictably around people walking and biking. They also have the potential to be much smaller and lighter than today's vehicles, reducing both the severity of crashes. These are meaningful benefits, and they are why we believe autonomous vehicle technology is worth pursuing.

Our concern with this legislation is not autonomous vehicles themselves, per se. Our concern is that this bill authorizes deployment before the governance framework is ready.

Autonomous vehicles are not inherently good or bad. They are not "safe" or "unsafe." Their behavior is determined by how they are designed and programmed. A few lines of code can make an autonomous vehicle significantly safer or, conversely, significantly more dangerous.

As I stated in my verbal testimony, this is not theoretical: we already see this difference in practice. Some companies, such as Waymo, have clearly prioritized safety in how their vehicles are programmed and early data suggests they could have stronger safety outcomes than the status quo. These programming decisions are not altruistic: it is because they understand that if their vehicles were routinely injuring pedestrians, construction workers, first responders, or other road users, they would not be permitted to operate on public streets.

Other companies, however, have made very different choices. Some competitors have implemented near-autonomous driving modes that explicitly prioritize speed and aggressive behavior over safety. Tesla, for example, has a "Mad Max Mode" that does just that. **This contrast underscores a critical point: autonomous vehicles are only as safe as the rules and incentives that govern them.**



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That is why we believe well-defined regulatory structures must be in place before authorizing deployment. Those structures must also be nimble and adaptable, because the technology is evolving rapidly. Without a clear and robust framework, we are effectively granting approval without knowing how safety decisions will be made or enforced.

Before we can support deployment, we need to see the regulatory framework itself. “Trust us, the rules will be good,” is not good enough. Autonomous vehicle technology has changed substantially since Oregon’s earlier AV task force and the policy environment has not kept pace with technological change. In addition, clear sideboards are necessary to ensure that safety, particularly the safety of people outside of vehicles, remains the top priority into the future. **As mentioned earlier, companies could easily change priorities via programming that deprioritize safety. We must adopt rules that clearly forbid this from happening.**

These are not insurmountable challenges. Many other states and jurisdictions are grappling with the same questions, and there is ample opportunity to learn from existing models rather than reinventing the wheel. We are more than willing to roll up our sleeves and engage in a collaborative rulemaking process in 2026 to prepare for the 2027 long session.

Sincerely,

Zachary Lauritzen
Oregon Walks