

COMMITTEE ON
**SCIENCE, SPACE, AND
TECHNOLOGY**
CHAIRMAN LAMAR SMITH



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Statement of Research & Technology Subcommittee Chairwoman Barbara Comstock (R-Va.)
U.S. Surface Transportation: Technology Driving the Future

Chairwoman Comstock: The products that flow through our networks of highways, railroads and pipelines are the lifeblood of our country's economy, and the nation's transportation infrastructure is the vital network through which it must flow. Consequently, dollars spent on the research, development and technology - or RD&T - activities at the Department of Transportation are essential to the nation's prosperity. These efforts support critical infrastructure, and enhance both a healthy economy and the most efficient transportation system.

Today's hearing provides the Committee with an opportunity to examine RD&T priorities at the Department of Transportation, and to understand the important policy issues regarding the future of surface transportation. We hold this hearing amidst the ongoing efforts to replenish the Highway Trust Fund with long term investment and planning.

I am intimately familiar with these concerns because in addition to my role as Chairwoman of this Subcommittee, I also serve on the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. I also live in a district filled with a diverse group of transportation challenges; from highway congestion to metro and airport issues.

Transportation funding challenges are not just a transportation policy issue, but a science and technology issue. We know the tech industry can provide us with breakthroughs for more efficient uses of transportation dollars and better ways to help relieve congestion.

A shortfall in RD&T funding would have real life consequences on technological advancements involving not just cars, trucks and trains, but highways, bridges and pipelines too. Later today we will hear more about one such exciting technology from one of our witnesses on the topic of autonomous cars. But while we may be several years away from a world of driverless cars, another important technology that can save lives already exists today.

By law, Positive Train Control - or PTC - technology is required on 60,000 miles of railroad track by the end of this year. The benefits can't come too soon as evidenced by last month's Amtrak derailment outside Philadelphia. Positive Train Control technology would have stopped the train from taking a 50 mile-per-hour turn at a speed of 106 miles per hour, and prevented the resulting fatalities and injuries. While Amtrak is on schedule to meet the deadline to implement PTC for its Northeast Corridor by the end of the year, it is troubling to note that many railroads are likely to miss the deadline, perhaps necessitating additional Congressional action.

Closer to home, our nation's Metro system suffers from outstanding safety issues that require continued vigilance by Congress as well as full support of the federal government for technological upgrades that would benefit many of us in the room today who rely on this form of transportation.

Today's hearing will also provide the Committee an opportunity to understand RD&T activities in surface transportation both at federally sponsored research institutions, as well as at state-level entities such as the one representing the University of Virginia.

I look forward to hearing everyone's testimony and to engage in a productive and fruitful discussion on U.S. surface transportation research, development, technology, investments, priorities, and policies.

I also look forward to continuing to work with many of you to maximize the effectiveness of surface transportation RD&T programs as Congress attempt to reauthorize the federal surface transportation programs. Thank you all for joining us today.