

Ford CEO says US needs to regulate automated driving systems

May 21 2021, by Tom Krisher



In this April 25, 2021 file photograph, the blue oval logo of Ford Motor Company is shown in east Denver. Ford plans to open a battery development center near Detroit by the end of next year. The company said the 200,000-square-foot facility will have equipment to design, test and even do small-scale manufacturing of battery cells and packs. Credit: AP Photo/David Zalubowski, File

The CEO of America's second-largest auto company is calling for the federal government to set standards for fully or partially automated vehicles to tighten the safety of electronic driving systems.

In urging federal regulation, Ford CEO Jim Farley becomes the highest-profile auto executive to publicly recognize a need to more closely monitor the [emerging technology](#), which is becoming more prevalent on America's roadways just as questions are being raised about the potential risks to motorists. In limited areas, companies are beginning to deploy fully autonomous ride-hailing services.

Farley's statements, in an interview with The Associated Press, follow increased scrutiny by regulators of Tesla's partially automated "Autopilot" driver-assist system, which has been involved in a series of high-profile crashes. Tesla also is using selected owners to test its "Full Self-Driving" software on public roads.

"Absolutely," Farley said when asked whether federal regulations are needed. "Today, the regulations are state-by-state," he said of fully [autonomous vehicles](#). "They're really oriented toward the development of the technology, not large-scale deployment of the technology."

He suggested that legislators and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration were moving too slowly.

"Time is of the essence," Farley said, explaining that Argo AI, an autonomous [vehicle](#) company in which Ford is a major investor, is moving ahead quickly with technology that will let Ford start an autonomous ride-hailing service.

Argo, which is testing autonomous vehicles with human backup drivers in six U.S. cities, expects to be ready for Ford to offer ride-hailing without human drivers sometime next year. In the Phoenix area,

Alphabet Inc.'s Waymo is already offering a limited fully autonomous ride service.

And later this year, Ford will offer "Blue Cruise," its own partially automated highway driving system that, like Tesla's Autopilot, keeps cars centered in their lane and a safe distance behind traffic in front of them. With Blue Cruise, drivers can take their hands off the steering wheel. But unlike Autopilot, they will be monitored by a camera to make sure they are paying attention.

"We've done the testing to feel comfortable with this system and how it's implemented," Farley said.

The CEO took an implicit jab at Tesla, saying that Ford does its own testing before rolling out the technology.



Jim Farley, Ford Motor Company's chief executive officer, stands next to the company's new Ford F-150 Lightning, Wednesday, May 19, 2021, in Dearborn, Mich. On the outside, the electric version of Ford's F-150 pickup looks about the same as the wildly popular gas-powered truck. The new truck called the F-150 Lightning can go up to 300 miles per charge, with a starting price of just under \$40,000. Credit: AP Photo/Carlos Osorio

"We don't want our customers to have to do any testing," he said.

Drivers often have thwarted Tesla's efforts to monitor them by detecting hands on the steering wheel. Earlier this month, a man was arrested in California after an officer spotted his Tesla on a freeway with the man riding in the back seat and no one behind the wheel. The man told the AP that his car was fully autonomous and designed so that he could ride in the back seat.

That's not true. Tesla has explicitly told California regulators that both "Autopilot" and "Full Self-Driving" are assist systems and that drivers must be ready to intervene.

A message was left Friday seeking comment from Tesla, which has disbanded its media relations department.

Farley's stance on regulation is unique in the auto industry, which has generally has favored voluntary guidelines over regulations. No federal regulations specifically govern electronic driving systems, although they do fall under safety standards that cover all vehicles.

The industry's biggest trade association, the Alliance for Automotive

Innovation, last month proposed voluntary guidelines for partially automated systems. The government's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has relied on voluntary cooperation, taking a hands-off approach so as not to discourage life-saving innovations.

But a few in the business have asked for [regulation](#). In April, Dan Ammann, CEO of GM's autonomous vehicle subsidiary Cruise, told Bloomberg Television that it was important for the United States and other countries to chart a "clear regulatory pathway." Regulations, Ammann said, are necessary for the U.S. to keep its leadership position.

In 2015, Volvo Cars CEO Hakan Samuelsson asserted that a patchwork of state rules and the absence of U.S. federal oversight could slow the development and introduction of autonomous vehicles.

Since President Joe Biden's inauguration, though, NHTSA has said it is taking a new look at the automated systems. The agency has since sent investigators to review at least four crashes involving Teslas in which Autopilot is at least suspected of being involved, and it is seeking public comment on developing safety principles for autonomous vehicles. In the past few years, NHTSA has sent teams to 29 Tesla incidents.

Farley says he's pleased by a renewed interest in regulations.

"We're very encouraged that the new leaders in the administration want to take on large-scale deployment" of autonomous vehicles, he said.

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