



April 24, 2025

American automotive manufacturing has long driven innovation and secured America's place as the global leader in the transportation sector. The advent of advanced vehicle technologies, including automation, provides unparalleled opportunities for the Nation to usher in a new era of transportation safety—with technologies developed and built by American workers. To reach this potential, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is committed to quickly identifying and removing unnecessary regulatory barriers that stand in the way of both safety and progress.

One such potential barrier is an existing exemption program available to certain foreign vehicles that do not fully comply with NHTSA's Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS) but not available to such vehicles built in the United States. Under a program for imported non-FMVSS-compliant vehicles set forth in 49 C.F.R. Part 591, NHTSA administers exemptions for research, demonstrations, and certain other purposes. This exemption promotes innovative designs, such as prototype vehicles, through an iterative review process that considers the overall safety of the vehicle along with the purposes for which the exemption is requested. In recent years, this exemption program has been used to a significant extent for automated driving system (ADS)-equipped vehicles imported into the United States. From 2016 through 2024, NHTSA exempted 347 imported ADS-equipped vehicles for operations in 295 projects across 31 states under Part 591.

To cultivate this Nation's tremendous potential for automotive innovation, the same exemption opportunities enjoyed by foreign vehicles must be made available for vehicles built in the United States. As such, NHTSA will now begin to accept and process requests for vehicles built in the United States to receive FMVSS exemptions for non-commercial purposes that involve research or demonstration in accordance with 49 U.S.C. § 30114(a). Entities interested in submitting such a request are encouraged to contact the Automation Exemptions Division of NHTSA's Office of Automation Safety at AVExemptions@dot.gov for more information. NHTSA will also soon publish a notice in the *Federal Register* related to this exemption opportunity for domestically-produced vehicles.

This change is a significant first step in advancing United States leadership in advanced vehicle technologies; it will not be the last. The agency is actively engaged in developing a multi-faceted regulatory framework for ADS-equipped vehicles. As part of this effort, NHTSA is also committed to substantially improving the efficiency and effectiveness of a separate exemption available to both foreign and domestically-produced vehicles set forth in 49 C.F.R. Part 555. Under the Part 555 regulations, NHTSA issues temporary exemptions from FMVSS or bumper standards because of substantial economic hardship, to facilitate the development of new motor vehicle safety or low-emission engine features, or due to the existence of an equivalent overall level of motor vehicle safety. This exemption allows for broader uses than the Part 591 exemptions, including commercialization, but involves a more extensive application process.

NHTSA encourages stakeholders to engage with NHTSA regarding the exemption processes described above and any other opportunities to address unnecessary regulatory barriers to safety and innovation, particularly for advanced vehicle technologies. NHTSA also encourages interested parties to submit comments on these exemptions or other deregulatory matters in response to a Request for Information (RFI) that the Department of Transportation (Department) published in the *Federal Register* on April 3, 2025. The Department seeks input to assist in identifying existing regulations, guidance, and other regulatory obligations that can be modified or repealed, to ensure that the Department promotes the national interest and achieves meaningful burden reduction while continuing to meet statutory obligations and ensure the safety of the U.S. transportation system.

Sincerely,

Peter Simshauser

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