

**FRANK R. LAUTENBERG**

NEW JERSEY

**COMMITTEES:**

COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND  
TRANSPORTATION

ENVIRONMENT AND  
PUBLIC WORKS

HOMELAND SECURITY AND  
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 7, 2005

Honorable Norman Y. Mineta  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
400 Seventh Street, SW  
Suite 10200  
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary Mineta:

I am writing to you regarding my concern about the use of cruise control systems in large trucks and their safety performance. Specifically, I am referring to crashes where trucks with cruise control systems engaged collide with other vehicles, especially light vehicles like cars. Recently, I met and heard firsthand from family members who had lost loved ones in truck crashes. Several of these crashes involved tired truckers who were using a cruise control system at the time of the crash. A large truck with the cruise control engaged and operated by a tired or distracted driver can have catastrophic consequences.

Post-crash investigations in several of these crashes I was informed about indicated that there was no braking or any evasive action taken by the truck drivers before their deadly impact with cars. It would appear that in these crashes the truck drivers were probably asleep at the wheel or were not alert, such that their cruise control systems helped propel these giant vehicles into other, smaller vehicles on the highway, even with the driver's foot off the accelerator pedal.

I understand that reduced truck driver alertness is also a serious problem in highway construction zones where large truck crashes are almost at epidemic proportions. Frequently work zone crashes involve large trucks colliding at high speeds with stopped or slower moving vehicles.

While there may be no standard safety mechanism to prevent this type of disaster, I understand certain innovative vehicle technologies, such as "Adaptive Cruise Control" systems, could address and mitigate this serious and deadly problem. Also, I understand there are sophisticated systems being developed that can be linked with various types of collision notification systems for truck drivers.

I would like to know whether the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) is aware of this problem and what regulatory actions the agency is taking to address it. Furthermore, I would like to know what actions the Department is taking, particularly in modal administrations like the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and FMCSA, to investigate and further the use of advanced technologies that can mitigate the consequences of a large truck crash involving an engaged cruise control system.

I would appreciate any information you could provide me about the Department's efforts to address this problem as well as ongoing research, policy development, and proposed regulatory actions to advance research and involve the use of technologies to compensate for a truck driver who is not alert or has a medical emergency while the truck's cruise control is engaged.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Frank R. Lautenberg". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "F" and a prominent "L".