

TESTIMONY REGARDING HB1614
Being heard by the North Dakota House Transportation Committee
On Thursday, February 13, 2025 at 10:30 AM

Dear Chairman Ruby, Vice Chairman Grueneich, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments in opposition to HB1614, Relating to the operation of an automated truck tractor; and to amend and reenact section 39-01-01 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to the definition of an automated truck tractor. Tesla's mission is to accelerate the transition to sustainable energy and transportation. Autonomous vehicle technology is key to achieving this objective. Furthermore, this technology is critical to improving transportation safety, increasing freight efficiency, and addressing future goods movement needs in North Dakota.

By requiring human operators in autonomous trucks—with no articulated path for the state to approve fully autonomous solutions—HB1614 would impose a clear ban on autonomous trucks in North Dakota. Prohibiting the deployment of autonomous trucks in the state would ensure that other states lead the way on trucking, while precluding North Dakota consumers, businesses, and its supply chain from realizing the benefits of this critical technology. To restrict heavy-duty autonomous vehicles (AVs) before the technology has had the opportunity to develop is excessive and risks the tremendous benefits to road users in North Dakota. Twenty-five states have recognized the numerous benefits of AVs by explicitly authorizing AV deployment, encouraging investment in AV technology in those states. This bill would forestall AV investment, development, and operations in North Dakota and make it an outlier nationally.

Further, this bill would effectively lock North Dakota into the current unacceptable level of traffic accidents on its roads by discouraging AV companies from investing in this life-saving technology in the state, given the significant restrictions on AV operations under this bill. AVs are safely operating commercially without a human driver across the country, and they will continue to make our roads safer. NHTSA [estimates](#) that nearly 43,000 traffic deaths occurred in 2022—approximately 100 fatalities per day. These deaths are overwhelmingly caused by human error. In fact, studies have found that driver behavior was the critical reason assigned to 87% of fatal injury crashes caused by large trucks.

Rather than increase barriers to AV operations, North Dakota should open the state to AV operations precisely *because it removes* human error from the equation. Unlike human drivers, AVs do not drive impaired, text while driving, fall asleep at the wheel, or recklessly speed. AVs have a 360 degree view of the world around them without blind spots and use advanced technology to make faster decisions than humans.

In addition to enhancing safety on our roadways, the AV industry is currently leveraging the existing workforce to create new roles for different education and skill levels. Many of the jobs created do not require a college degree, such as service technicians, remote assistance operators, mapping data collectors, and delivery packers. Workers with experience in the trucking industry specifically, particularly as truck drivers, offer valuable skills to AV trucking employers. Unfortunately, the U.S. trucking industry is currently short of around 80,000 truck

drivers due to a long-term decline in new drivers entering the profession, and an annual turnover rate exceeding 90%. This truck driver shortage is estimated to double by 2031. North Dakota must find ways to move *more* freight with *fewer* truck drivers to do it. Autonomous trucks are one part of the suite of solutions and will augment the important work that truck drivers do for our country.

AVs can also help reduce traffic congestion, improve environmental quality, and advance transportation efficiency. In particular, autonomous heavy-duty vehicles that operate in interstate commerce hold the promise of increasing the safety and efficiency of freight movement. According to a recent study funded by the U.S. Department of Transportation and Federal Highway Administration, automating long-haul trucking will spur \$111 billion in aggregate investment spending across the U.S. economy, increase total U.S. employment by 26,400 to 35,100 jobs per year on average, and raise annual earnings for all U.S. workers by more than \$200 per worker per year.

Tesla looks forward to working with this Committee to put forward a regulatory framework that supports the full deployment of AVs which would better equip North Dakota's transportation system, environment, and workforce to take advantage of the benefits presented by this technology.

I apologize for not being able to be with you in person to share these comments but am available to speak with the committee as it moves forward.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Zachary Kahn
Senior Managing Policy Advisor
Tesla, Inc.