



What's at Stake

For most Americans, driving is their primary mode of transportation. Roadway accidents are the leading [cause](#) of death for children and young adults worldwide. Approximately [1.19 million](#) people each year globally are fatally injured in traffic crashes. In 2025, there were nearly [37,000](#) traffic fatalities in the United States.

While men are statistically more likely to be involved in fatal crashes as drivers, women face distinct and well-documented [risks](#) as passengers and victims of impaired or aggressive drivers. According to federal traffic data, a significant share of women killed or seriously injured in vehicle crashes are passengers—not drivers—meaning their safety is entirely dependent on the behavior and sobriety of drivers behind the wheel. Additionally, for women who rely on rideshare services, taxis, or rides from acquaintances, the risks extend well beyond the road itself. [Sexual harassment and assault](#) by rideshare and taxi drivers are widely documented, with thousands of incidents reported annually.

Autonomous vehicles (AVs) have the potential to improve road safety, accessibility, and productivity. Several cities already have AVs on their roads, and many more are considering legislation to allow testing or deployment. There are benefits and risks of AVs, as well as questions—including massive labor force displacement—that must be answered as the technology becomes more integrated into society.

The Way Forward

Women with greater access to safe and reliable transportation have greater access to opportunity. The freedom to move safely, affordably, and on one's own terms is foundational to the independence and self-determination that Independent Women champions. AV technology, if permitted to develop and deploy responsibly, represents a significant expansion of that freedom.

Autonomous vehicles can:

- Improve the freedom of senior citizens
- Support busy mothers as they run multiple errands and juggle child care
- Expand mobility options for women in underserved communities, those without access to personal vehicles, and individuals with disabilities

For policymakers considering whether to allow AV operation within their borders, the greatest challenge will be balancing risk prevention and innovation. Resolving these challenges—such as liability issues, costs, and power outage concerns—will enable society to realize the full benefits of AVs and transform driving for the better.

Addressing Misperceptions

MISPERCEPTIONS	FACTS
Autonomous vehicles are all the same.	The NHTSA has adopted a classification system from the Society of Automotive Engineers: Level 0: Momentary Driver Assistance, Level 1: Driver Assistance, Level 2: Additional Driver Assistance, Level 3: Conditional Automation, Level 4: High Automation, and Level 5: Full Automation. Most cars are at Level 0 or 1, with basic systems such as emergency braking and cruise control. Tesla’s popular Autopilot feature is a Level 2 system because it requires the human driver to be fully engaged and attentive. There is a significant gap between cars currently on the road—even the most advanced ones—and the autonomous vehicles with the most potential.
Autonomous vehicles aren’t safe.	AV technology offers protection from the most pervasive cause of traffic fatalities: human error. Autonomous vehicles have fundamentally changed the discourse around road safety. Although there are some issues that need to be resolved, AVs can significantly reduce traffic fatalities by delegating driving to a system powered by artificial intelligence (AI). Cameras with 360-degree views of streets and sidewalks can give the AI system a broader perspective than a human driver, and have the potential to dramatically reduce fatalities associated with driving. A 2025 peer-reviewed study, examining data from Waymo on more than 50 million fully driverless miles on public roads, found 80% reductions in crashes compared with human drivers on the same streets.
Americans are wary of AVs.	Today, millions of Americans ride in these autonomous vehicles, which operate in 11 U.S. cities and are expanding to 20 more. Companies such as General Motors and Mercedes-Benz are also investing in AV research and development. Studies show that older adults trust this technology and would be willing to use AV transportation if given the opportunity.

To learn more, read [Policy Focus: Autonomous Vehicles](#).