

Dept. of Transportation: MAASTO leaders call on FCC to reverse safety decision

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The Federal Communications Commission should preserve a broadcast band currently devoted to transportation safety instead of converting it to Wi-Fi use, leaders of the Mid America Association of State Transportation Officials (MAASTO) said today.

“As connected and automated vehicles come on line, this broadcast spectrum will be vital to keep both motorists and pedestrians safe,” said Craig Thompson, MAASTO president and Wisconsin Secretary of Transportation. “Industry is already developing technology that will use this band for safety applications. Diverting it to Wi-Fi won’t have much of an impact on Wi-Fi availability, but it may very well end up in unnecessary injury and death,” he said.

Thompson said he supports US Department of Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao’s calls for the FCC to reconsider the pending decision. News organizations have reported on a letter Secretary Chao sent to the FCC in which she called the changes “fatally flawed” and would put efforts to use connected vehicle technology “in peril.”

The FCC proposal would shift 30 megahertz of the 75 megahertz reserved for Dedicated Short-Range Communications (DSRC) to enable a different automotive communications technology called Cellular Vehicle-to-Everything, or C-V2X, while shifting the other 45 megahertz to Wi-Fi use. FCC Chairman Ajit Pai said the commission will vote Nov. 18 to finalize the plan.

“The Ohio Department of Transportation strongly supports U.S. Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao’s position that the 5.9 GHz spectrum should continue to be preserved for transportation safety technology,” said Jack Marchbanks, director of the Ohio Department of Transportation and a member of the MAASTO board. “In the Buckeye State, we are ready to deploy 5.9 GHz-linked CAV technology along a 35-mile stretch of US 33 which connects East Liberty, Ohio to Marysville, Ohio and Dublin, Ohio – for the express purpose of making our roadways safer for motorists and pedestrians. If the utilization of the 5.9 GHz spectrum in transportation infrastructure can help save one life in Ohio or anywhere in the nation, it will be more than worth holding it from auction.”

““We are disappointed that the FCC has decided to take this action at a time when the development of Connected Autonomous Vehicle technology is being advanced for public safety,” said Michigan Department of Transportation Director Paul C. Ajegba, another member of the MAASTO board.

MAASTO’s mission is to foster the development, operation, and maintenance of an integrated and balanced transportation system that adequately serves the transportation needs of its member states: Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, and Ohio. It is affiliated with the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). To learn more about MAASTO, visit <http://www.maasto.net/>