



January 18, 2022

**Autonomous Vehicles Will Aid Access, Safety, and Jobs in Massachusetts;
Reject Bills That Threaten Their Potential
(HB 3595, HB 3475, SB 2351)**

State Representative William Straus
House Chairman
Joint Committee on Transportation
Massachusetts General Court

State Senator John Keenan
Senate Vice-Chairman
Joint Committee on Transportation
Massachusetts General Court

Dear Chairman Straus, Vice-Chairman Keenan, and Honorable Members of the Committee,

Good afternoon,

Autonomous vehicles have the potential to make Massachusetts a safer, more convenient, and more equitable place to live -- but only if it takes a smart approach to AV regulation.

We urge you to reject several bills before your committee – including HB 3475, HB 3595, and SB 2351 – which would set back the future promise of autonomous vehicles for Massachusetts.

Our organization works to ensure that all Americans benefit from technological leaps, and our commitment to a progressive society, economy, and workforce sets us apart from other business groups. For example, we strongly support federal legislation to promote voting rights; supported President Biden's proposed corporate tax increase; and back a national emissions reduction target of 50% by 2030.

We are also strong supporters of autonomous vehicle development, because we believe AVs will have a positive impact on our communities.

First, autonomous vehicles will help close the food gap. All Massachusetts residents should have access to healthy, affordable food options in their neighborhoods. Residents in low food access areas continue to be plagued by the food desert crisis and are forced to travel far away to get to grocery stores. In some communities AVs are helping groceries and food via low-speed, seatless, passengerless autonomous vehicles. This would give Massachusetts residents that live outside food-rich areas the same convenient and affordable access to fresh fruits, vegetables, milk, and meat they need to live happily and healthily.

Second, autonomous vehicles will help close the accessibility gap. It's harder for those with disabilities to navigate by bus in times of inclement weather, in times when an accessible stop isn't available, or when there is no room for their equipment on a busy day. For the blind and other people living with disabilities, safe autonomous vehicles can't arrive fast enough.

Third, autonomous vehicles will bring safer streets and reduce the number of accidents. In 2021, nearly 400 people died in traffic related accidents in Massachusetts.¹ Research shows that at least 90% of car crashes are caused by human error, and studies suggest that putting AVs on the road now could save hundreds of thousands of lives over the long term. By eliminating cases of distracted drivers, drivers under the influence, or geographically lost drivers, AVs can reduce the number of pedestrian and bike fatalities that occur in the Commonwealth.

Finally, autonomous vehicles will spur new jobs in Massachusetts. The Federal Department of Transportation reported in 2021 that the use of automation systems would create jobs in the transportation and logistics industries, and other business sectors.² The US Department of Labor and its state partners have created job transition and retraining programs to assist those affected by the introduction of autonomy. These entities help drivers adapt to new technologies and market conditions, helping them find gainful employment.

With the tremendous potential of autonomous vehicles to make Massachusetts a safer and more equitable state, it is so important to test, improve, and deploy autonomous vehicles without delay. Yet each of these bills as written would handicap Massachusetts competitively and deter AV companies from testing and deploying vehicles in the Commonwealth.

By imposing human driver requirements that undercut the goal of fully-self-driving vehicles (HB 3595); limiting the commercial applications of self-driving cars (HB 3475); and enabling a confusing patchwork of municipal-level AV regulations (SB 2351); each of these bills would set back the development of AVs in Massachusetts – even as development speeds forward in other states.

We share your concerns and commitment to safety. But implementing these proposed regulations would unnecessarily prolong the future promise of autonomous vehicles for Massachusetts. For the sake of supporting those with disabilities, addressing food deserts, reducing traffic deaths, and increasing employment opportunities, we encourage you to reject these bills.

Sincerely,



Montana Williams
Director of State & Local Public Policy

¹<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2022/01/03/metro/390-people-died-mass-roads-last-year-state-highway-officials-report-most-fatalities-since-2009/#:~:text=Preliminary%20statistics%20indicate%20that%20390.of%20Public%20Safety%20and%20Security.>

2

<https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2021-01/Driving%20Automation%20Systems%20in%20Long%20Haul%20Trucking%20and%20Bus%20Transit%20Preliminary%20Analysis%20of%20Potential%20Workforce%20Impacts.pdf>