



October 21, 2022

Director Greg Spotts
Seattle Department of Transportation
700 Fifth Avenue, Suite 3800
PO Box 34996
Seattle, WA 98124-4996

Re: Proposed Seattle Autonomous Vehicle Permit Program

Dear Director Spotts:

On behalf of Chamber of Progress, a tech industry association working to ensure all Americans benefit from technological leaps, I write to express concerns regarding the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) proposed Autonomous Vehicle Testing Permit program which would impede the benefits of autonomous vehicles in Seattle and Washington State at large.

We are strong proponents of autonomous vehicles because of the potential to save hundreds of thousands of lives and benefit our communities – promoting sustainability, mitigating transit gaps, combating food insecurity, and increasing mobility for the elderly and disabled.

Autonomous vehicles will lead to safer streets and reduce the number of accidents. Earlier this year, the National Highway Traffic Safety Association (NHTSA) released crash data¹ reporting nearly 43,000 lives were lost in traffic-related fatalities in 2021. Tragically, in the first half of 2022 alone, 327 lives were claimed due to traffic-related incidents in Washington. 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.²

In addition to major improvements in traffic safety, AVs have the ability to serve Seattle's disadvantaged minority and disabled population by closing food and transit accessibility gaps. Traditional transit systems have historically contributed to inequality for disadvantaged minority and disabled communities. By leveraging this new technology, AVs will significantly reduce transportation obstacles for millions of Americans.³

¹ Traffic Safety Facts: Crash Stats, U.S. Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (May 2022) <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813298?source=email>

² Traffic Safety Facts: Crash Stats, U.S. Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (February 2015) <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812115>

³ Self-Driving Cars: The Impact on People with Disabilities (January 2017) https://rudermanfoundation.org/white_papers/self-driving-cars-the-impact-on-people-with-disabilities

While we support Seattle's goals of safely ushering in AVs, we have concerns that the proposed Permit Program is inconsistent with AV policy and requirements set by the State.

In 2017, Governor Inslee issued an executive order that provided a vision and framework for the safe testing and operation of AVs while establishing Washington as a technology innovator.

However, Seattle's proposed permit contradicts the state's clear policy of encouraging and allowing AV innovation. The permit program contradicts state permissance of driverless operation and deployment while introducing requirements that could grind AV innovation in Seattle to a halt.

For example, the city's proposed rules:

- Impose a \$10 million insurance requirement that exceeds the state's \$5 million insurance requirement;
- Requires the presence of a human test driver, directly contradicting the text of Governor Inslee's executive order;
- Requires crash reporting within four hours, far exceeding the federal government's current reporting requirement of one day for serious incidents and one month for minor incidents; and
- Exclude heavy-duty AVs over 10,000 pounds, even though they are expressly allowed under the state's order.

Seattle's proposed Permit Program would create inconsistencies among local regulations within Washington State. When local jurisdictions are left to create a patchwork of AV regulations with varying requirements, it hinders competition in AV testing and deployment as companies eager to do business in the state and willing to comply with testing and operation regulations are met with additional barriers to entry.

Washington's existing autonomous vehicle testing and deployment law fosters responsible innovation and takes a cautious approach to AV technology testing and deployment. Over the last several months, Washington has conducted extensive research and outreach to gather input on approaches that balance the benefits and risks to road safety and incorporate Washington values such as equity, inclusivity, and environmental protection. It would be premature to impose a permitting structure in Seattle without considering ongoing work and forthcoming actions at the state level

Finally, the Department missed an opportunity to engage key stakeholders in the rulemaking process. By using a Street Use permit – which is more commonly used for parking or temporary road closures, and which does not require public comment – the city has adopted this permit without any public comment period at all. A public process would have allowed SDOT to gain insight into the best approach for balancing public safety while aligning with the State's goal to advance AV technology.

For these reasons, we respectfully request that SDOT pause the adoption of this permit program until the program can be brought in closer alignment with the state's existing autonomous vehicle policy.

Thank you for your consideration on this important matter.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jamie Pascal". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jamie Pascal
Director of Civic Innovation Policy
Chamber of Progress