



Testimony of Aden Hizkias
Policy Analyst
Chamber of Progress

Re: Oppose B25-0710, the “Autonomous Vehicle Testing Permit Requirement
Amendment Act of 2024”
Committee on Transportation and the Environment

June 6, 2024

Good morning Councilmember Allen and members of the committee:

My name is Aden Hizkias and I serve as Policy Analyst, for the Chamber of Progress, a tech industry coalition committed to ensuring all Americans benefit from technological leaps. Our corporate partners include companies like Cruise, Waymo, and Zoox, but our partners do not have a vote on or veto over our positions.

We respectfully urge your committee to oppose B25-0710, which would hinder the advancement of autonomous vehicles even after they have proven their safety through rigorous testing.

We are strong supporters of autonomous vehicles because of their potential to save hundreds of thousands of lives and benefit our communities – promoting sustainability, mitigating transit and food accessibility gaps, and increasing mobility for vulnerable District residents like the elderly and disabled.

Autonomous vehicles will not be deployed on public roads without rigorous testing and safety certification. Before deploying in a new city, AV operators map the streets in detail and conduct tests of their technology in virtual simulations, closed courses, and public roads with human safety drivers in the car. Before testing without a human driver, AV operators must also certify to safety agencies that their technology can operate safely.

Only after completing these tests can AVs be tested on the roads without human drivers, a crucial final step in ensuring the technology responds correctly to real-time road conditions. By requiring a human operator through the entire testing stage, this bill would make the final testing stage impossible, effectively preventing full deployment of AV technology in the District.

By stunting the development of AVs, this bill will deny their full benefits to D.C. residents: safer roads, reductions in roadway emissions, and expanded mobility.

Autonomous vehicles can bring safer streets and reduce the number of accidents. 2023 was the deadliest year on D.C. roads since 2007, with 52 traffic-related fatalities.¹ Nationwide, speeding, distracted and impaired driving, and failure to wear a seatbelt are the leading causes of roadway deaths and injuries.²

Unfortunately, even the best public awareness campaign can't force drivers to keep their eyes on the road. **Unlike humans, AVs never drive distracted, drunk, or fatigued.** And their safety record is impeccable. In fact, a recently published study found that autonomous ridesharing services in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Phoenix experienced 57% fewer police-reported crashes and 85% fewer crashes involving injuries compared to human drivers.³

Autonomous vehicles also promote sustainability efforts. Through high-speed driving, braking, and re-acceleration, humans burn a lot of gas and energy while driving.⁴ According to the Southwest Research Institute, through connectivity and automation, vehicles can reach 20% improvement in fuel efficiency.⁵ Since AVs are programmed to follow traffic rules and speed limits, they will ultimately burn less gas and energy. Deploying autonomous vehicles can help the District reach its goals to reach net-zero emissions by 2045.⁶

¹<https://mpdc.dc.gov/page/traffic-data>

² <https://madd.org/press-release/epidemic-plaguing-americas-roads-reaches-historic-levels/>

³<https://waymo.com/blog/2023/12/waymo-significantly-outperforms-comparable-human-benchmarks-over-7-million/>

⁴ <https://greenerideal.com/news/vehicles/driverless-cars-environmental-benefits/>

⁵<https://www.swri.org/press-release/vehicle-fuel-efficiency-improvement-connectivity-automation-arpa-nextcar>

⁶

<https://doee.dc.gov/service/greenhouse-gas-inventories#:~:text=DOEE%20regularly%20tracks%20the%20District's,net%2Dzero%20emissions%20by%202045.>

Autonomous vehicles will help fill transit accessibility gaps. 25% of households in the District are underserved by public transportation.⁷ Where public options are scarce, autonomous vehicles can increase transportation options and connect residents to mobility hubs.⁸ According to the Urban Institute, AVs can also improve paratransit services,⁹ expanding transit options for the 11% of D.C. residents with mobility disabilities.

Requiring a human safety operator to be present for all AV testing will stunt the development of AVs in the District and block their benefits for D.C. residents. 53% of voters are ready to ride in an AV now or in the next five years, and the same number support the testing and deployment of AVs in their state.¹⁰ In fact, 25 states have already approved frameworks for testing and deploying autonomous vehicles.¹¹ In San Francisco, in the month after they were opened to the public, autonomous rideshare services logged over 36,000 paid trips.¹²

With their tremendous potential to make D.C roads safer and promote equity and sustainability, it is essential to continue testing, improving, and deploying AVs without delay. B25-0710 would hinder this critical progress. For those reasons, Chamber of Progress respectfully urges your unfavorable report of the bill.

We welcome continued discussion on the concerns outlined in this letter. Please feel free to reach out to Brianna January, Director of Government Relations for the Northeast at brianna@progresschamber.org or (443)-758-3920.

Thank you.

⁷ <https://dc.curbed.com/2018/2/7/16985720/transit-map-dc-gap-finder>

⁸ <https://media.maymobility.com/May-Mobility-Cities-Today-AVs-Transforming-Public-Transportation-Case-Study.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/shared-autonomous-vehicles-could-improve-transit-access-people-disabilities-if-regulated#:~:text=Because%20AVs%20don't%20need,and%20can't%20currently%20drive.>

¹⁰ <https://progresschamber.org/morning-consult-poll-dems-biden-voters-union-members-support-autonomous-vehicles/>

¹¹ https://www.realclearpolicy.com/2024/05/23/25_states_have_autonomous_vehicle_laws_1033588.html

¹² <https://www.sfchronicle.com/sf/article/cruise-waymo-san-francisco-18472568.php>