



May 3, 2024

Senator Anna Caballero
Chair, Appropriations Committee
1221 O St. Suite 7620
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Chair Caballero and members of the committee,

On behalf of the Chamber of Progress, a tech industry coalition promoting technology's progressive future, I write to oppose SB 915, which would hamstring autonomous vehicle innovation in California.

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 the elderly and disabled.

While we appreciate the author's willingness to work on the bill, the most recent version still does not address our concerns. Local governments would still be empowered to enact a patchwork of AV regulations on top of, and potentially undermining, oversight by state and federal agencies. From failed Vision Zero goals to persistent housing shortages, local regulations have consistently stood in the way of progress. This bill would stifle innovation of autonomous vehicles, denying Californians their benefits and perpetuating the roadway safety crisis.

Autonomous vehicles will bring safer streets and reduce the number of accidents. The National Highway Traffic Safety Association (NHTSA) released crash data reporting nearly 43,000 lives were lost in traffic-related fatalities in 2022.¹ Between 2019 and 2021, traffic deaths and fatalities in the United States rose by 17.5 percent - the largest two-year increase since World War II.²

¹<https://www.nhtsa.gov/press-releases/traffic-crash-death-estimates-2022#:~:text=The%20National%20Highway%20Traffic%20Safety,42%2C939%20fatalities%20reported%20for%202021.>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/15/briefing/vehicle-crashes-deaths-pandemic.html>

In the first half of 2023 alone, there were 2,061 traffic-related fatalities in California.³ Research shows that at least 90% of car crashes are caused by human error.⁴ By removing human error from the roads, autonomous vehicles can help eliminate the leading causes of crashes and fatalities. 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.⁵

Autonomous vehicles are also popular. A survey commissioned by Chamber of Progress found that 53% of voters are ready to ride in an AV now or in the next five years, and the same number supported the testing and deployment of AVs in their state.⁶ Union members also overwhelmingly support the deployment of AVs, with 75% of respondents saying they supported testing AVs in their state. In San Francisco, in the month after they were opened to the public, autonomous rideshare services logged over 26,000 paid trips with over 36,000 passengers.⁷ Voters and California residents are excited about the possibilities of autonomous vehicles.

³ <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813514>

⁴ <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812115>

⁵ <https://waymo.com/blog/2023/12/waymo-significantly-outperforms-comparable-human-benchmarks-over-7-million/>

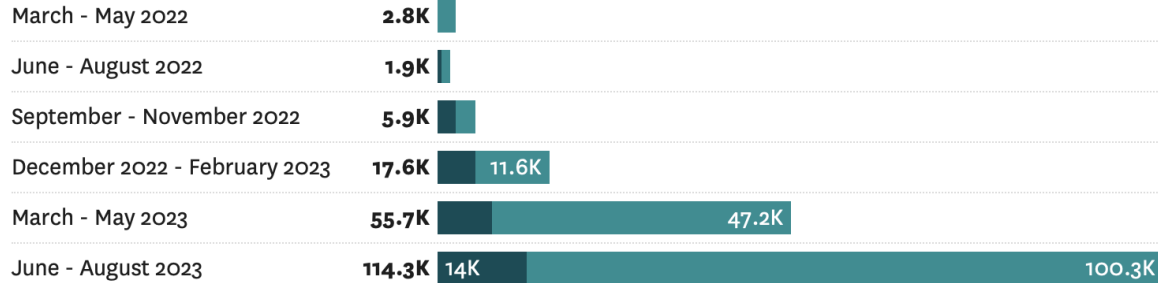
⁶ <https://progresschamber.org/morning-consult-poll-dems-biden-voters-union-members-support-autonomous-vehicles/>

⁷ <https://www.sfchronicle.com/sf/article/cruise-waymo-san-francisco-18472568.php>

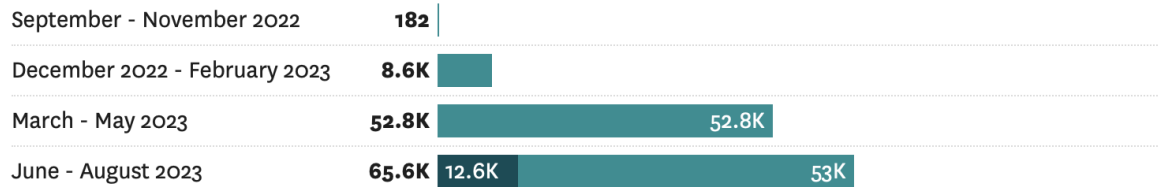
Total completed driverless trips by Cruise and Waymo

■ Paid trips ■ Unpaid trips

Cruise



Waymo



Quarterly figures include reported driverless trips completed by Cruise and Waymo autonomous vehicles using driverless pilot and deployment permits. Waymo was permitted to start driverless ride-hail trips only in November 2022.

Chart: Sriharsha Devulapalli / The Chronicle - Source: California Public Utilities Commission

Past experience has shown that municipal vetoes can stand in the way of progress. As in the case with issues like housing production, previous experience has shown that local jurisdictions will compete with each other in a sort of “race to the bottom” in terms of approval conditions and bad faith posturing.

Despite having an abundance of local capacity and a desperate need for the development of housing, every single coastal jurisdiction failed to meet their housing production goals assigned to them by Regional Housing Needs Assessments (RHNA) for over 20 years, all while the population continued to steadily grow⁸. As laid bare in a 2015 Legislative Analyst Office (LAO) report on housing, the primary reason that California did not build enough housing, and thus suffers from an unprecedented housing affordability crisis presently, is because regional approval processes were stymied by local opposition, oftentimes referred to as NIMBYism⁹.

⁸ <https://abag.ca.gov/our-work/housing/rhna-regional-housing-needs-allocation>

⁹ <https://lao.ca.gov/Videos/Player?playlistId=20&videoid=138>

This same “not here, somewhere else” mentality is also oftentimes applied to the permitting of new homeless shelters and affordable housing in particular. As we have seen in cities like Atherton and Belvedere, some of the most expensive places to live in the entire country, local residents are adamantly opposed to new affordable housing, even while openly acknowledging the severe need for these types of units¹⁰. The message is clear: “anywhere but here”. This same mentality will, and already is being applied to the deployment of AVs.

Cities have also tried to lead on roadway safety, and again have failed to meaningfully reduce crashes and fatalities. Since 2016, 19 cities have implemented Vision Zero plans to eliminate traffic-related deaths,¹¹ but the number of deaths has only increased in the last few years. Between 2019 and 2022, traffic fatalities increased in California by 22%.¹² Nearly 10 years after Los Angeles adopted its Vision Zero goal, traffic fatalities outpaced homicides in 2023.¹³ Between their failures on housing and safety, cities have lost the ability to lead in this area.

The state is the proper regulator of autonomous vehicles. California’s Department of Motor Vehicles and Public Utilities Commission, in addition to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and U.S. Department of Transportation, already oversee the safety standards and deployment of autonomous vehicles. These agencies have the technical expertise and oversight capability necessary to regulate this new technology. Governor Newsom echoed this sentiment in his veto message of Assembly Bill 316, which also related to the proper regulation of autonomous vehicles by the state, saying “existing law provides sufficient authority to create the appropriate regulatory framework” in reference to the DMV’s capacity to draft new regulations.¹⁴ Requiring local governments to develop additional rules and oversee compliance by autonomous vehicles, without providing the necessary funding or technical expertise, will burden any jurisdiction looking to expand accessible transportation options for their residents.

Last year, Dee Dee Myers, Director of the Governor’s Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz), raised concerns that AB 316, a bill that would

¹⁰ <https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/belvedere-housing-marin-county-18617242.php>

¹¹ <https://highways.dot.gov/safety/zero-deaths/vision-zero-cop/vision-zero-action-plans>

¹² <https://tripnet.org/reports/traffic-safety-california-news-release-06-21-2023/>

¹³ <https://abc7.com/los-angeles-lapd-crime-statistics-homicide/14356841/#:~:text=Shootings%20were%20down%2010%25%20in.%25%20to%20336%2C%20surpassed%20homicides.>

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/AB-316-Veto-Message.pdf>

ban autonomous trucks in California, would undermine existing oversight and hamper economic competitiveness. In her words, “our state is on the cusp of a new era and cannot risk stifling innovation at this critical juncture”.¹⁵ As Governor Newsom said when vetoing the bill, “existing law provides sufficient authority to create the appropriate regulatory framework” for autonomous vehicles.¹⁶

SB 915 raises the same concerns. Allowing local regulations for autonomous vehicles would undermine existing state and federal oversight, hamper innovation, and stand in the way of lifesaving technology.

Accordingly, we urge you to hold this bill in appropriations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert Singleton', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Robert Singleton
Director of Policy and Public Affairs, California and US West

¹⁵ <https://www.politico.com/f/?id=0000018a-1e52-d2a3-a3fe-ffaa3a20000>

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/AB-316-Veto-Message.pdf>