



Department for Transport

From the Permanent Secretary

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05 December 2024

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown FRICS MP
Chair of the Public Accounts Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

[Sent via email]

Dear Sir Geoffrey,

Local roads in England – Follow up evidence on Autonomous Vehicles

Thank you for the opportunity to provide evidence on what the Department is doing in relation to local roads in England alongside my Departmental colleagues David Buttery (Director of Roads Strategy) and Rupert Furness (Deputy Director, Local Highways and Active Travel).

I am writing to the Committee to follow up on the additional points that were raised concerning the current position on self-driving vehicles, and the considerations around changes in highway infrastructure to prepare for their safe introduction.

As the Committee may already be aware, trials of self-driving vehicles are already taking place on road networks in Great Britain. This includes Government-funded projects as well as trials by private companies. These trials must comply with existing regulatory requirements and are covered by the Code of Practice for Trialling¹, first published in 2015 and regularly updated since then, most recently in November 2023.

Self-driving vehicles will need to be able to safely operate using existing highway infrastructure, and the Government does not therefore anticipate any immediate changes in current highway maintenance practices. However, some connected and automated mobility functions, for example routing services and fleet oversight functions, will require connectivity.

Local highway authorities may choose to develop their networks to maximise the benefits of new technologies (e.g. sending a warning of a hazard on a road). National Highways are exploring the impacts of self-driving vehicles on road layout, lane markings and roadwork design, and digitisation of infrastructure across the Strategic Road Network.

In May 2024, the Automated Vehicles (AV) Act received Royal Assent to enable scaled deployments beyond trials. The Act sets out legal responsibilities and creates a regulatory safety framework. The Government aims to lay the secondary legislation covering the

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/trialling-automated-vehicle-technologies-in-public/code-of-practice-automated-vehicle-trialling>

main AV regulations in the second half of 2027, which will incorporate several statutory instruments along with statutory guidance.

The AV implementation timeline is designed to prioritise the development of a regulatory framework that maximises public safety and ensures public support. The Government's planned 2027 implementation date aligns with the UN Automated Driving System regulations and will enable harmonisation with international frameworks.

By setting a phased schedule, we can ensure there is ample time for thorough consultation with industry, academia, and the public. As part of this we will seek to reassure that our road networks will be sufficiently able to facilitate the safe introduction of self-driving vehicles.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Bernadette Kelly', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dame Bernadette Kelly DCB
Permanent Secretary