

Review of the legislative and regulatory framework for testing driverless cars

Terms of Reference

Background

Britain aims to put itself at the forefront of an exciting area of advanced vehicle technology following a pledge by the Government as part of the 2013 National Infrastructure Plan. The advent of connected and 'autonomous' technology in vehicles offers enormous opportunities in terms of safety on the roads, better management of road space to reduce congestion and potentially reducing emissions. This also represents a significant area of interest and investment in the global automotive industry. We have come to rely on many technologies that assist the driver of a vehicle (for example ABS, cruise control or parking sensors) and as some of these technologies evolve, they are reaching the point where a vehicle is capable of operating for periods of time with reduced, or in some instances without driver input. Because of the potential benefits the technology offers, manufacturers have carried out extensive testing on private test tracks, and the next step is to see whether and how it may be possible to carry out carefully controlled testing on public roads. The Department for Transport (DfT) is undertaking a review of the relevant legislation and regulations to ensure that there is a clear and appropriate regime to enable cars with advanced autonomous safety systems to be tested on British roads.

Purpose of Study

The review will establish what issues must be addressed to enable the testing of such technology on UK roads whilst maintaining existing high levels of road user safety. The review will look at both national and EU regulations affecting the use of vehicles on British roads.

The review will cover the best and safest ways of carrying out trials where there is an individual in the vehicle who is qualified and capable of taking control of the car (i.e. seated in the conventional driving position); and also look further ahead, to the implications of potential use of fully autonomous vehicles.

In doing so, the review will take into account:

- The need for the vehicle to comply with construction and safety regulations.
- The need for the vehicle to comply with traffic laws and rules when in use.
- The application of the Highway Code in relation to the use of the vehicle.
- Licensing and insurance requirements and liability for the vehicle and its use.
- Legislation managed by the devolved administrations.
- Comparable regimes for testing driverless cars that have been put in place in other countries.
- The potential to remove regulatory barriers to other innovative forms of personal transport.

Governance

The review will be chaired by Ian Yarnold – Head of International Vehicle Standards at DfT. He will be supported by a team based at DfT. Regular updates, minutes of meetings and logs of material reviewed will be provided to him.

Timescale

The review is expected to be published by the Secretary of State for Transport by the end of December 2014. The report will be published on the www.gov.uk website.