Australian Automobile Association

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MEMBER OF FIA

Ms Michelle Landry MP
Committee Chair
Standing Committee on Industry, Innovation, Science and Resources
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

6 February 2017

Dear Ms Landry

I write to you in response to the *Inquiry into the social issues relating to land-based driverless vehicles in Australia* (the Inquiry).

Introduction

The AAA is the peak organisation for Australia's motoring clubs and their eight million members. The AAA advances the interests of all road users across Australia to ensure land transport networks are safe and sustainable, and that the cost and access to transport is fair for all Australians.

AAA member clubs are involved in automated technology policy development across Australia. The AAA is also aware of several automated vehicle trials that are currently in progress around the country, with the most advanced of these being the Royal Automobile Club's (RAC) Intellibus™ trial in Perth which commenced the on-road stage of the trial in August 2016. In an Australian first, and among the first in the world, the trial uses a vehicle which carries passengers and interacts with traffic, parked cars, cyclists and pedestrians using the road environment.

The AAA understands that the RAC will be providing the Standing Committee on Industry, Innovation, Science and Resources (the Committee) with a more detailed submission to the Inquiry, as such this letter aims to only provide a broad overview of the AAA's policy position in relation to increasingly automated and fully autonomous passenger vehicles.

Social issues relating to driverless passenger vehicles

Automated technology in vehicles is not a new concept. Motorists can today purchase cars with electronic blind spot assistance, automated emergency braking systems, park assist, adaptive cruise control, lane keep assist, lane departure warnings and traffic jam and queuing assist technologies. Such features have, and will continue to significantly improve the safety of Australia's light vehicle fleet.

The AAA believes the potential social benefits associated with the introduction of increasingly automated vehicles in Australia are significant. Analysis conducted by researchers at the University of Texas, found that benefits will be realised in the areas of safety, congestion, accessibility for the elderly and disabled, emissions and transport affordability.[1] These benefits are of strong interest to our member organisations and all road users. However, many of these benefits will be realised as vehicles become increasingly automated, well before vehicles become fully autonomous or driverless.

The AAA believes that the future of improving vehicle safety lies partly with autonomous technologies, as human error is believed to be a factor in over 90 per cent of road crashes.[2] As road trauma on our roads continues to rise, if 90 per cent of road crashes could be prevented around 1,200 lives every year could be saved and almost 38,000 Australians kept out of hospital. [3] This would have a profound social impact, while also significantly reducing the economic cost of road trauma, which is estimated at $34 billion a year in today's dollars.[4]

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[1] Fagnant and Kockelman (2015) University of Texas; *Preparing a nation for autonomous vehicles: opportunities, barriers and policy recommendations for capitalizing on self driving vehicles:* viewed at: (http://www.ce.utexas.edu/prof/kockelman/public_html/TRB14EnoAVs.pdf)
[2] US Department of Transportation, Traffic Safety Facts (2015) accessed at: https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812115
[3] Figures are based on 1,300 recorded fatalities in 2016 and 42,169 traffic accident hospitalisations in 2014-15 published by BITRE and the AIHW. These figures have then been reduced by 94 per cent.
[4] Bureau of Transport, Infrastructure and Regional Economics (BITRE) 2009, Road crash costs in Australia 2006, Report 118, Canberra, November. The original figure of $27 billion in this report was calculated in real 2006 dollars, this has been updated to $34 billion to reflect real 2016 dollars using the Consumer Price Index.

As such, the AAA continues to advocate for policies which would bring about the staged introduction of increasingly automated technologies in passenger vehicles to build consumer confidence, improve safety outcomes and guarantee the reliability of these technologies as they are incorporated into fully driverless vehicles.

Building social acceptance

In 2016 the RAC conducted a community awareness and perceptions survey to better understand what Western Australians know, think and feel about autonomous vehicles. The RAC will provide further details of the survey to the Committee, however of significance was the finding that: those who drive vehicles with high levels of automation; and those with an awareness of autonomous vehicles are significantly more likely to agree with the forecast benefits associated with the introduction of autonomous vehicles.

This finding suggests that the Australian community will begin to embrace autonomous technology as higher levels of automation penetrate the vehicle fleet and awareness and understanding of the technology improves.

The RAC survey also finds that 49 per cent of respondents are very concerned about who will own the data that autonomous vehicles may collect about the trips users are making. In order to build community acceptance, the AAA considers that consumers should have access and control of the data that their vehicles produce, so that there is not an adverse impact on competition, privacy or consumer choice. Given the pace at which innovative technology is being deployed in new cars, the existing regulatory framework may not adequately protect consumer privacy and maintain a competitive service and repair industry into the future.

Recommendations to progress action

Countries all around the world including the United States, Japan, South Korea, China, Singapore, the UAE and many member countries of the European Union[5]

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[5] ERTRAC Automated Driving Road Map July 2015 accessed at: http://www.ertrac.org/uploads/documentsearch/id38/ERTRAC_Automated-Driving-2015.pdf

are moving to ensure that the adoption of automated technology is not only unhindered but encouraged.

The AAA believes that the Australian Government should work actively with state and territory governments to incentivise the development, testing and roll-out of vehicles with increased automation and, where necessary, seek to harmonise legislation that will ultimately allow the operation of these vehicles on the road network.

The Australian Government should also support research projects that seek to better prepare all Australian governments for a sustainable future with highly automated and autonomous vehicles. Lessons learned through trials, like the RAC Intellibus™ initiative, should also be well publicised and communicated through relevant intergovernmental bodies.

Lastly, the AAA urges the Australian Government to closely consider any final recommendations from the Productivity Commission's review into Data Availability and Use and the ACCC's Market Study of the New Car Retailing Industry that strengthen consumer access to data.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss the AAA's policy position further with the members of the Committee. Should you have any questions of detail, or wish to arrange a meeting, please contact Sophie Finemore – Senior Advisor – Economic Policy and Research on [redacted]

The AAA thanks the Committee for the opportunity to comment on the Inquiry and looks forward to progressing this important policy matter into the future.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

MICHAEL BRADLEY
Chief Executive