

February 12, 2018

The Honorable Susan McLain
Chair, House Committee on Transportation Policy
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

SUBJECT: HOUSE BILL 4063 – AUTONOMOUS VEHICLES – OPPOSE

Dear Representative McLain:

Global Automakers, www.globalautomakers.org, represents the U.S. operations of international motor vehicle manufacturers, original equipment suppliers, and other automotive-related trade associations. Our members are making significant investments and progress in the research and development of automated vehicles. In Oregon, our members manufactured 53% of the vehicles sold in the state, including 64% of the green vehicles sold.

OUR POSITION

Global Automakers opposes HB 4063 as introduced. HB 4063 appears to demonstrate a fundamental misunderstanding of the technology. The bill requires a licensed human operator be in the driver's seat of an autonomous vehicle, actively monitoring the driving environment, and prepared to take over active physical control of the vehicle. For Level 4 or 5 vehicles, a licensed driver does not need to be present or available to monitor the system when operating autonomously. Such a provision would unnecessarily limit access to the safety, efficiency, and mobility benefits of automation.

HB 4063 also includes rulemaking authority for the Department of Transportation to adopt rules which "specify the minimum standards that the department concludes are necessary to ensure the safe operation of autonomous vehicles on highways in compliance with the laws of the State of Oregon, and may include rules for revocation, suspension or denial of any license, autonomous vehicle registration or approval required for the operation of autonomous vehicles on highways in this state." While states are responsible for driver licensing, and vehicle registration and insurance, states should not encroach on federal responsibilities concerning the design and performance capabilities of motor vehicles. Adopting rules dictating "approval required for the operation of autonomous vehicles" may encroach on that federal responsibility. A state-by-state approval process for deployment of automated vehicles will stifle innovation and delay the life-saving potential of this technology. Effectively, the state of Oregon would be able to prevent a manufacturer from selling an automated vehicle in Oregon even if the vehicle is certified at the federal level and could thus be sold in the other 49 states. The federal government is the regulator of vehicle design and performance, an area where states have no role.

SAFETY IS EVERYTHING

Global Automakers and our members take vehicle safety very seriously and it is our highest priority in the design and production of new vehicles. Over the past several decades, the automotive industry has made tremendous strides in improving the safety of vehicle occupants in the event of a crash. Crash avoidance improvements, such as electronic stability control, are also reducing crashes. Many of these improvements are often foundational to the development of more highly automated systems. It is well recognized that AV systems, across all levels of automation, will provide significant opportunities for improving safety, efficiency, and mobility; and with the increase in highway fatalities, it is important, now more than ever, that the policy environment continues to support the safe testing and deployment of innovative technology.

THE NUMBERS

Unfortunately, vehicle crashes, deaths and injuries remain too high. In 2016, 37,461 lives were lost on U.S. roads; an increase of 5.6 percent from calendar year 2015. In Oregon alone, that number was 495 fatalities, an 11% increase from the previous year. Advanced technology has the potential to make great strides in improving road safety with the deployment of driver assists, connected vehicles, and automated technologies that will help address and mitigate the main causes of fatalities, human error and impairment.

THE DEPLOYMENT

Automated vehicles have garnered significant media attention. Like any new and transformative technology, the idea of increased vehicle automation is often met with mixed reactions ranging from fear, uncertainty, and doubt, to excitement and anticipation for the future of “self-driving.” Those attitudes begin to change when people are exposed to, and gain familiarity, with new technology. In fact, the majority of people want some form of automated features in their vehicles. It is therefore crucial not to limit advancement of technology, but to encourage it.

We are already seeing deployment of certain automated features and even certain “Level 2” systems where the vehicle is capable of the sustained performance of certain aspects of the driving task when monitored by the driver. With investment and continued innovation, we will likely see even more advanced systems being deployed on our roadways in the future. The critical question for state and local policymakers then becomes not “WHEN” will we see highly automated vehicles?” BUT “HOW do we position ourselves to support the deployment of automated vehicle technology for today and the future?”

STATE ACTIVITY

Several states, including Oregon’s neighbors, have taken a more flexible approach to promoting automated vehicles technology. Washington State Governor Jay Inslee issued an executive order which strikes the right balance of safety and innovation and is allowing the state of Washington to become a hub of research and development. Similarly, Idaho Governor Butch Otter issued an executive order that is designed to show the state of Idaho is forward thinking and open to letting innovators innovate.

Pursuing HB 4063 would make Oregon an outlier among its neighbors and would signal that the state is not open to promoting automated vehicle technology and all its potential benefits.

Oregon can play a similar leadership role without enacting legislation by (a) convening key stakeholders and innovators to leverage resources and share best practices, and (b) collaborating with neighboring states to support regional efforts to advance automated vehicle technology while at the same time ensuring a national framework for automated vehicle policy.

We welcome the opportunity to work with Oregon to identify and remove barriers to automated vehicle advancement (for all levels of automation) and to create a flexible policy environment in order to realize the safety potential of this technology.

Sincerely,



Josh Fisher
Manager
State Government Affairs