



# TESTIMONY

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## REGULATIONS REGARDING AUTONOMOUS VEHICLES: SENATE BILL 1050

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Testimony Before the Missouri Senate Transportation, Infrastructure, and Public Safety Committee

### TO THE HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THIS COMMITTEE

My name is David Stokes, and I am director of municipal policy for the Show-Me Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan Missouri-based think tank that supports free-market solutions for state and local policy. The ideas presented here are my own. This testimony is intended to summarize research that analysts for the Show-Me Institute have conducted and reviewed regarding the introduction and use of autonomous vehicles (AVs) in Missouri.

As complicated as autonomous vehicles are, Missouri Senate Bill 1050 (SB 1050) regarding their use in Missouri is admirably simple. SB 1050 clarifies that AVs (cars that are not controlled primarily by drivers) would be allowed to operate in the state if they meet basic safety standards. The legislation also prevents local government from adding additional regulations or taxes to AVs beyond the state regulations that the legislation directs the Department of Public Safety to create.

The people of Missouri learned from the emergence of other web-based companies like Uber, Lyft, AirBNB, and VRBO that local governments in Missouri are only too happy to institute a dizzying array of competing rules, codes, and taxes for the new companies to attempt to comply with. That is not to say that every local regulation for these companies has been bad, just that expecting

new technology companies like Uber to comply with different rules in a large number of counties or cities is unrealistic, undesirable for their consumers, and harmful to economic growth. We witnessed the attempts by the Metropolitan Taxicab Commission in St. Louis to oppose new technology and prevent Uber and Lyft from operating in the city in a blatant attempt to protect the previously dominant taxicab interests in St. Louis from competition.<sup>1</sup> That type of local governmental abuse cannot be allowed to happen with autonomous vehicles.

From an economic perspective, AVs present an opportunity for economic growth by lowering the cost of safe, high-quality transportation and making more efficient use of our motor vehicle capital stock. AVs don't circle the lot five times looking for the perfect parking space. They don't drink and drive or get angry at the person who cut them off. Most importantly, they get in accidents at a substantially lower rate than other cars.<sup>2</sup>

The enhanced mobility autonomous vehicles could provide has the potential to benefit Missouri's cities by making them easier places to get around. In both Kansas City and Saint Louis, population density is low compared to other major cities, and destinations are spread across a wide geographic area.<sup>3</sup> Low population density, dispersed employment, and population clusters make it difficult for public transportation agencies to provide service that is a feasible alternative to personal vehicles.<sup>4</sup> Autonomous

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vehicles are perfect for automobile-oriented environments and provide on-demand service, which may allow them to more effectively compete with personal cars and complement urban transit systems. Such an advantage can be critical for urban entertainment districts, because customers are more likely to patronize those areas if a convenient, safe, and affordable alternative to personal vehicles exists.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, with increased non-personal vehicle mobility, dense urban environments may become a more appealing place to live or set up a business.

Autonomous vehicles will benefit the suburban and rural parts of the state as well. People often drive more miles on average in those areas, and the increased safety of AVs will be vital. The author recalls “Blood Alley” in Jefferson County in the 1980s. A safer driving option in rural Missouri will save lives.

Autonomous vehicles provide an opportunity for increased mobility, improved safety, and greater transportation choice throughout Missouri. What’s more, they do it through consumer choice and private investment. SB 1050 is an appropriate and concise bill designed to guarantee their legal use in Missouri once the various systems meet certain qualifications.

## NOTES

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