



**Testimony Before the New York City Council
Committee on Transportation
Oversight: The Future of Driverless Vehicles in New York City
October 28, 2016**

Introduction

Good morning Chair Rodriguez and members of the Committee on Transportation. My name is Julie Samuels and I am the Executive Director of Tech:NYC. Tech:NYC is a non-profit trade group that launched in May of this year with the mission of supporting the technology industry in New York by, among other things, increasing engagement between our industry and New York City government. It is also our goal to demonstrate to the growing technology industry that New York is the best place for technology and the companies that build it to grow and develop. We believe that New York's unique business ecosystem as a global center for so many industries, such as finance, media, fashion, art and real estate, will serve to strengthen the technology businesses that call New York home.

Overview

Self-driving cars represent one of the most exciting and promising developments emerging from the technology industry today. Self-driving car technology promises extraordinary benefits—ranging from significantly improving human safety to dramatically reducing the massive carbon footprint of automobiles. Like any new technology with far-reaching implications, there are undoubtedly concerns and considerations about how this technology will work and be used.

To best harness the promise of self-driving technology while ensuring it meets public considerations such as safety will require a consistent dialogue between industry and government. As a trade group that represents several companies interested in developing self-driving technology, we are pleased today to begin that conversation with this committee, and the City Council in general; a discussion that will undoubtedly continue in the months and years to come.

As we start this conversation, we also want to emphasize the importance of sending the right message to technology leaders nationwide that New York is a welcoming environment for the technology industry. The industry is, and will continue to be, a source of significant job growth in New York. Employment in the technology industry in



New York City increased 71 percent between 2004 and 2014.¹ Notably, at a time when wage stagnation is so prevalent in the U.S., technology sector jobs in New York City pay more than one-third of the City's average private sector salary.² The growth and high wages of technology firms is particularly noteworthy for New York City at a time when city tax revenue is declining for the first time in several years.³ We believe it is important for lawmakers to think about how we attract the types of businesses that create jobs and generate economic development. A highly-visible issue like self-driving cars is important for the perception of New York as a tech-friendly city.

How Would A New York Future Look with Self-Driving Cars?

New York is a city unlike any other in the U.S. As a result of its individuality, self-driving cars present unique opportunities for New York that could improve many of New York's most significant day-to-day challenges.

First, pedestrian safety is an issue of paramount importance in New York. It is well known that Mayor de Blasio has made the pursuit of zero traffic deaths a primary focus of his administration through his Vision Zero initiative. Last year in New York City, more than 3,500 people were killed or severely injured in traffic crashes.⁴ While this number represents a significant improvement from years past -- much to the credit of the Mayor and Commissioner Trottenberg -- we can all agree that we would like to see that number dramatically lower.

The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA), the federal agency charged with protecting the traveling public, tells us that 94 percent of automobile-related crashes can be tied to human choice or error.⁵ By reducing the element of human choice or error, self-driving cars can dramatically lower the deaths and injuries attributable to cars.⁶ In fact, in guidance documents that I will discuss more later, the NHTSA stated that "the automobile industry is on the cusp of a technological

¹ Center for an Urban Future, "New York's Tech Profile" (August 2015)
<https://nycfuture.org/data/nycs-tech-profile>.

² NYS Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli, "New York City's Growing High-Tech Industry" (April 2014)
<https://www.osc.state.ny.us/osdc/rpt2-2015.pdf>.

³ Dawsey, Josh, "New York City's Tax Revenue Slumps" The Wall Street Journal, Oct. 26, 2016
<http://www.wsj.com/articles/new-york-citys-tax-revenue-slumps-1477530508>.

⁴ City of New York, "Vision Zero 2015 Year End Review" (2015)
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/visionzero/assets/vz-year-end-report.pdf>.

⁵ U.S. Dept. of Transportation, National Highway Transportation Safety Administration, "Federal Automated Vehicles Policy: Accelerating the Next Revolution in Roadway Safety" (September 2016).

⁶ *Id.*



transformation that holds promise to catalyze an unprecedented advance in safety on U.S. roads and highways.”⁷

Next, self-driving cars promise significant improvements in New Yorkers’ quality of life. New York is a place where space—both on our streets and in general—is at a premium. A future with self-driving cars means a significant reduction in car ownership and fewer cars sitting parked on our streets or in garages serving no purpose. Most cars sit unused for 22 hours a day,⁸ and there is no reason why we can’t take land back from cars for beneficial uses. Less on-street parking could mean extra dedicated and protected lanes for cyclists. And reducing our need for parking lots and parking garages means more land for parks and developing housing.

Reduced car ownership would also decrease the financial burden that cars have on their owners. The average car-owning family in New York spends over \$2,000/year on gas, insurance and repairs.⁹ This does not take into consideration costs that are particularly high in New York City such as monthly parking fees or parking tickets.

Finally, the reduced need for vehicles could significantly improve the city’s air quality and our carbon footprint. A recent Community Air Survey issued by the City’s Department of Health and Mental Hygiene indicates a strong correlation between high-traffic roads and highways and negative air quality in certain New York neighborhoods.¹⁰ And it’s not just high-density roads that we should be concerned about—in congested urban areas, about 40 percent of total gasoline use is by cars looking for parking.¹¹ In addition to our own air quality, vehicle reduction will have a meaningful impact on our carbon footprint and global warming—roughly 13 percent of greenhouse gases nationally are attributable to passenger vehicles and light-duty trucks like SUVs, pickup trucks, and minivans.¹²

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ KPMG & Center for Automotive Research, “Self-Driving Cars: The Next Revolution” <http://www.kpmg.com/us/en/issuesandinsights/articlespublications/documents/self-driving-cars-next-revolution.pdf>.

⁹ Khan, Chris, “Car Ownership Costs by State” Bankrate.com <http://www.bankrate.com/finance/auto/car-ownership-costs-by-state.aspx>.

¹⁰ City of New York Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and Queens College, City University of New York, “The New York City Community Air Survey” (April 2016). <http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/environmental/comm-air-survey-08-14.pdf>

¹¹ KPMG, “Self-Driving Cars: The Next Revolution.”

¹² U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, “Sources of Greenhouse Gas Emissions” <https://www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/sources-greenhouse-gas-emissions#transportation>.



Regulating Self-Driving Cars

Tech:NYC supports a balanced approach for regulating self-driving cars. In September, President Obama published an op-ed that argues that we must strike a balance in regulating self-driving cars. He stated that “[r]egulation can go too far” at times, and “government sometimes gets it wrong when it comes to rapidly changing technologies.” But at the same time “Americans deserve to know that they’ll be safe today even as we develop and deploy the technologies of tomorrow.”

To strike that balance, in September the NHTSA issued a Federal Automated Vehicle Policy. That policy outlines a 15-point Safety Assessment that sets a range of goals for manufacturers based on factors like object detection and response, crashworthiness, cybersecurity, human/machine interface, data-sharing and other factors.¹³ The agency states that the policy is by no means the final word on automated vehicles but an effort to establish a foundation and a framework upon which future agency action will occur. We think this is a sensible approach.

NHTSA’s guidance document also provides model state rules in an effort to avoid a patchwork of inconsistent laws and regulations among states and jurisdictions, which could delay the widespread deployment of self-driving cars. In order to avoid interference and confusion, the agency encourages states and jurisdictions to allow it alone to regulate the performance of self-driving cars for now.

Conclusion

As a role for states and localities develops to regulate self-driving cars, Tech:NYC wants to be a partner with the City of New York to craft its laws and regulations that work for both the industry and the unique characteristics of New York. We look forward to working with this Committee and the entire Council going forward.

¹³ Davies, Alex, “The Feds Just Got Real About Self-Driving Cars (It’s About Time)” Wired.com (Sept. 19, 2016) <https://www.wired.com/2016/09/feds-just-got-real-self-driving-cars-time/>