

CLIENT ALERT

U.K. Accelerating Plans to Go Driverless

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On February 6, 2019, the U.K. government announced plans to move forward on advanced trials for self-driving vehicles, the result of which could allow for fully driverless cars onto U.K. roads later this year.

U.K. regulations currently provide that any autonomous vehicle being tested on public roads in the U.K. must be roadworthy, insured and supervised by a driver – whether in the vehicle or by remote-control – who is “ready, able and willing” to resume control at any time. These laws, along with a series of further guidelines, were published by the Centre for Connected and Autonomous Vehicles (CCAV), which was established as part of the Department for Transport (DfT) in 2015, in its Code of Practice for self-driving vehicles. Per today’s announcement from the DfT, the CCAV has now unveiled a series of updates to that code, and is developing a new framework for ‘advanced trials’ that could remove the need for the safety driver.

The CCAV notes that the government is aware of the growing desire to conduct more advanced trials on public roads, and that such trials may currently be outside of the law and may require support and facilitation from the Department for Transport to proceed. As a result, the DfT has pledged to develop and operate a process to support advanced trials on public roads.

What does this announcement mean for Autonomous Vehicle and Transportation-as-a-Service companies?

The updates to the Code of Practice include details on how firms conducting autonomous vehicle testing can engage with relevant bodies and the public.

The new code also includes the expectation that those conducting tests will publish safety information and performance reports before any trial takes place.

The CCAV says the updates to the Code of Practice will “reinforce the U.K.’s status as a global leader in the safe and responsible testing of automated vehicles”. The DfT described its announcement as a “major boost” to the U.K.’s market for connected and automated vehicles, which it estimates will be worth £52 billion (\$67 billion) by 2035, and declared that the U.K. is “on track to meet its commitment to have fully self-driving vehicles on U.K. roads by 2021”.

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