



MAG Position Statement

Autonomous Vehicles

History

Driverless cars and other autonomous vehicles have been discussed for decades. Politicians and road planners see many advantages to having a vehicle controlled by technology. However, history proves technology is not infallible.

Reality

Technology has the ability to make road travel safer, for example with improved emergency stopping times. The UK Government seeks to lead the world in autonomous vehicle technology. Claimed benefits include denser use of road space, reductions in road casualties and convenience. The Department for Transport has laid out a non-statutory Autonomous Vehicles Code of Practice. The Code outlines the definition of an autonomous vehicle, considerations for manufacturers and operators and the status of such vehicles in law during the testing phase. Autonomous vehicles already operate in some locations, such as airports and factories, using various technologies.

There are drawbacks to reliance on technology, including the risk of systems being 'hacked' or overridden, the removal of human control in an emergency and insurance liability.

Currently

The UK Government is in discussion with a number of manufacturers to allow autonomous vehicles on our roads. This includes regulation for commercial on-road use. This could affect human-operated vehicles – for instance allocation of existing highway space exclusively for autonomous vehicles, with human-controlled machines prohibited from entering these areas.

MAG position

MAG does not oppose the freedom of the individual / individuals to choose the vehicle they wish to travel in. MAG has no objection in principle to the operation of autonomous vehicles on public roads - providing they can reliably detect all other road users and take necessary action regardless of the size, speed or angle of approach of all vehicles, persons or animals.

MAG does however oppose further erosion of road space to facilitate autonomous vehicles. This would generate congestion and infringe the rider's right to choose the desired route and freedom of movement. Evidence shows such restrictions are also counter-productive in terms of pollution, traffic flow and safety. Rather, the technology should integrate into existing road infrastructure arrangements.

For autonomous vehicles to operate on our roads the question of liability to be fully resolved beyond reasonable doubt. MAG is eager to participate in consultations and to work directly with the Department for Transport in a measured, data-based and equitable manner that balances developments with the rights of all road users, to have access to road space without prejudice favouring autonomous vehicles.