



Lisa Miller & Associates

Business Development, Government Consulting, Public Relations

LMA NEWSLETTER

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Autonomous Vehicle Update

Florida continues its leadership role in Automated Vehicles with a new law July 1 allowing riderless vehicles on Florida's public roads for research purposes. The legislation, championed by Senator Jeff Brandes (R-Pinellas), includes both Autonomous Vehicle and Connected Vehicle technologies.

It allows someone with a valid drivers' license to operate an autonomous vehicle on public roads; eases equipment requirements; prepares for a truck platooning test; and requires our metropolitan planning organizations around the state to consider autonomous technology when writing long-range transportation plans.

Truck platooning may have more immediate applications according to some private engineers working with the Florida Department of Transportation on its [FAV initiative](#). Platooning links vehicles together like a train on the highway, separated by an invisible but calculated distance between each truck through vehicle-to-vehicle communication.

Google's self-driving cars have logged about 1.6 million miles around Mountain View, California, the company's headquarters, as well as Arizona, Texas, and Washington - all without major incident. Of the 20 or so accidents that did occur, Google has accepted blame for only one, which involved a collision with a bus.

Despite the progress that's been made in developing and street testing these so-called "ghost driver" cars, efforts to bring driverless trucks to the road are likely decades away say researchers, given the consequences any component failure would have, as some trucks carry as much as 80,000 pounds of cargo.

A team of former Google robotic engineers are trying to make autonomous 18-wheelers a reality sooner through Otto, a San Francisco startup company. Otto's plan uses software, sensors, lasers and cameras that would allow trucks to navigate the more than 220,000 miles of U.S. highways on their own, while a human driver monitors systems or even naps in the back of the cab.

For now, the driverless trucks would only take control on the highways, leaving humans to handle the tougher task of driving through city streets. It's similar to the auto pilot feature that flies aircraft at high altitudes while leaving the takeoffs and landings to humans.



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Florida Accelerating Its Leadership Role in Automated Vehicle Development

The Florida Department of Transportation is partnering with Florida Polytechnic University to build a new state-of-the-art transportation technology testing facility named “SunTrax” in Auburndale, near the University’s Lakeland campus. Their goal is to create a high-tech hub for research, development, and testing of all emerging technologies, including tolling, intelligent transportation systems (ITS) and automated vehicle (AV) and connected vehicles.

SunTrax will include a 2.25 mile oval track on a 400-acre site and actively involve students and faculty in applied research together with industry partnerships. It will also serve FDOT as a nearby testing facility for its tolling technology used on Florida’s Turnpike Enterprise system throughout Florida. The Turnpike has more than 5.5 million SunPass customers who use their toll facilities daily. The system processes more than 1.3 billion toll transactions annually statewide for FDOT and for regional and local toll agencies.



The initial phase of the project will be construction of an innovative toll testing facility expected to offer local and potentially national and international certification for tolling technologies. The construction of the

oval track will be designed to support high speed testing of toll technologies, with multiple lanes and parallel tolled express lanes similar to those being constructed on many current highway widening projects throughout the state.

The approximately 200-acre infield of the track will be developed next, and is expected to become a hub for automated and connected vehicle testing, providing a safe environment for testing these emerging technologies before they are deployed in live traffic. A simulated city center, suburban and rural roadways, interconnected signalized intersections, interchange ramps, roundabouts, and various types of pavement are some of the features planned. The facility would also be equipped to perform research, development and testing for data and security, vehicle safety and equipment certification.

The University also notes the economic development potential of the new facility to the region, saying SunTrax will be the first step in building the surrounding area into a destination for the development of this quickly emerging and advancing automotive technology. Hundreds of acres are available immediately adjacent to the facility for future development that will support the growth of this emerging industry.