

UK GOVERNMENT WANTS TO SEE FULLY DRIVERLESS CARS ON UK ROADS BY 2021

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Legal Briefings

In its [Budget](#) on 22 November 2017, the UK Government predicted that the driverless car industry will be worth £28 billion to the UK economy and committed to establishing the UK as a world leader in the development and deployment of driverless car technology. The Chancellor, Phillip Hammond MP, stated that the Government wants to see fully driverless cars – without a human operator – on the roads by 2021, and announced a number of regulatory changes and investment commitments to achieve this aim.

Regulatory changes

Driverless cars are already being tested on UK public roads. However, under current rules, a licensed and suitably trained operator must supervise the vehicle at all times and be prepared, if necessary, to override the automated functions. The Chancellor stated that the Government will make "world-leading changes" to the current regulatory framework, to allow driverless cars to be tested on UK public roads without a human safety operator on board.

The proposed changes will likely entail an amendment to the Road Traffic Act 1988 and would represent a significant shift away from the current regulatory framework. It would also bring the UK's position in line with certain parts of the United States, including Florida and Michigan, where driverless cars can be deployed without a human operator.

Investment commitments

Following the allocation of £100 million in the Autumn 2015 Budget for research and development into Intelligent Mobility, the Chancellor announced a range of further funding commitments aimed at enhancing the development of electric and driverless car technology and the systems required to implement and adopt that technology. These included:

- £5 million to trial 5G applications and its deployment on roads, including testing how to maximise future productivity benefits from driverless cars;
- £200 million, to be matched by private investment, into a new £400 million Charging Investment Infrastructure Fund to support the transition to zero emission vehicles; and
- £100 million to guarantee the continuation of the Plug-In Car Grant, to help consumers with the cost of purchasing a new battery electric vehicle.

In addition, the National Infrastructure Commission will launch a new prize to determine how future roadbuilding should adapt to support driverless cars.

Automated and Electric Vehicles Bill

At the same time, [the Automated and Electric Vehicles Bill](#) - which proposes to introduce an insurance framework for high level autonomous vehicles - continues its progress through Parliament. It was considered in a Public Bill Committee and reported without amendment on 16 November, and will now move to be considered at Report Stage.

The Government has stated that it wants to create "the most advanced regulatory framework for driverless cars in the world." While that may still be some way off, the Bill, coupled with the commitments announced in the Budget, appear to be a step in the right direction.

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