

Autonomous Vehicles – The Future Has Arrived in Michigan

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Michigan now allows driverless autonomous cars on the public roads. On December 9, 2016, Michigan Governor Rick Snyder signed four bills into law providing the most expansive set of laws governing autonomous vehicles in the country. Prior to this new legislation, Michigan only allowed testing of autonomous vehicles with a human driver. The key features of new laws include:

1. Driverless cars are permitted on all public roads.
2. Networks of “on demand” self-driving “taxis” can be operated by either automotive manufacturers or other companies (such as tech and ride-sharing companies) if the vehicles are supplied or controlled by the automotive manufacturers.
3. Automated platoons of trucks can travel together at set speeds.
4. The public can buy and sell autonomous vehicles when they become available (after testing and certification).
5. The creation of the Michigan Council on Future Mobility to recommend policies and regulate vehicle networks.
6. The automated driving system (if used) will be considered the driver and operator for purposes of Michigan motor vehicle laws. Texting bans will not apply to passengers driven by autonomous vehicles.
7. Manufacturers will be protected from liability where the automated system has been modified, and repair shops will be protected if the repairs are made according to manufacturer specifications.

To encourage innovation and investment, the new laws provide greater autonomy, reduce regulation, and begin to shift safety responsibility to the industry players such as automotive, tech and ride sharing companies. The new laws, however, still require testing and certification of autonomous vehicles, leave open issues of interpretation such as the contours of the immunity from liability, and the role of non-automakers. Federal safety standards will still apply.

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