

## Province on verge of allowing autonomous automobiles on road

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Senate Committee on Transport and Communications deputy chair Senator Patricia Bovey, right, during a news conference regarding connected and automated vehicles in Ottawa, Monday.

OTTAWA — Manitoba is set to be the second province to allow the testing of self-driving cars, as parliamentarians push for regulations to keep Canada abreast of a looming technological revolution.

Manitoba Infrastructure Minister Ron Schuler announced Monday in Ottawa the Pallister government would table amendments to the Highway Traffic Act to test autonomous vehicles on provincial highways.

The announcement came hours after the Senate transport committee urged the federal Liberals to co-ordinate competing departments, with some bureaucrats hitting the brakes out of safety concerns, while others hope to drive innovation by stepping on the gas.

The committee included half of Manitoba's six senators, including vice-chairwoman Patricia Bovey.

"We're approaching the end of the era of human-driven automobiles, and this has huge implications across a number of sectors," Bovey said. "The future has a way of becoming the present very quickly, and we need to be ready, so that we can greet it on favourable terms."

The report recommends giving the privacy commissioner greater reach over how automobile companies use drivers' information, including whether companies can monetize personal information, and giving federal cybersecurity officials a bigger role over protecting the new technology from hackers.

The committee also says the government must invest more in its own research of self-driving cars to deal with questions of safety, such as how to ensure a driverless vehicle safely navigates a snow-covered road.

Bovey noted Winnipeg suffers from potholes, and streets with no visible painted traffic lines, which automated cars often rely on.

The senators urged a balance between stricter regulations than the United States, without stifling competition.

Quebec Sen. Dennis Dawson compared the advent of driverless cars to the challenges wrought by ride-hailing apps. Winnipeg's city council only gave services such as Uber the green light last month, but the costly plan suggested by Manitoba Public Insurance might keep them out of the market entirely.

"It's frankly shocking how unprepared we were for the arrival of Uber, when any 19-year-old with a smartphone could have told you it was a good idea and it was on its way. Today, we face a similar situation," said Dawson.

Federal Transport Minister Marc Garneau said Ottawa will present a plan in the coming months for the safe introduction and use of automated vehicles on Canadian roads, not just for research.

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Schuler said that's also Manitoba's long-term goal, as he announced the province's upcoming legislation. Ontario is the only province that currently allows research for self-driving cars on its roads.

Fully-autonomous vehicles may still be a decade or more away, but companies are already testing prototypes on Canadian and American roads. Automakers have also introduced assisted-driving features on newer model cars such as adaptive cruise control and automated parking.

The committee's report, which Garneau requested shortly after taking office, says self-driving cars could reduce the number of vehicle collisions that are largely caused by human error, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and boost productivity.

But it could also lead to job losses in transportation sectors that employ some 1.1 million people, including truck, bus, and taxi drivers. The Liberals, the committee says, must put in place job retraining programs for those whose jobs will be affected, and ensure sectors such as after-market companies can maintain a foothold as new, automated cars hit the roads.

— *with files from The Canadian Press*

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