

Beat: Automobiles

California Gov. Brown signs bill to allow self-driving cars on public streets

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USPA News - California Governor Jerry Brown on Tuesday drove in a self-driving Toyota Prius before signing a bill which will allow internet search giant Google and other companies to test their driverless cars on public streets and highway, making California the second U.S. state to do so. Brown signed Senate Bill 1298, which was authored by Democratic state Senator Alex Padilla, and will soon allow driverless cars to be operated on public roads for testing purposes, provided that each vehicle has a fully licensed and bonded operator in the driver's seat to take control if necessary.

"Autonomous vehicles are another example of how California's technological leadership is turning today's science fiction into tomorrow's reality," said Brown after he pulled up to Google's headquarters in Mountain View in a Toyota Prius with no driver. "This law will allow California's pioneering engineers to safely test and implement this amazing new technology." Google executives and elected leaders joined Brown for the bill's signing ceremony, which took place at the so-called Googleplex. The event took place nearly 50 years to the day after animated sitcom "The Jetsons", which features flying driverless cars that resemble flying saucers, made its debut on ABC. Officials believe autonomous vehicles could reduce highway fatalities, pollution and congestion while expanding mobility options for elderly and disabled people. "Tragically, thousands of Californians die each year in auto accidents," Padilla said. "The vast majority of these collisions are due to human error. Autonomous vehicle technology has the potential to reduce traffic accidents and save lives .. Through the use of computers, sensors and other systems, autonomous technology can analyze the entire 360° driving environment more quickly and accurately and can operate the vehicle more safely than a human driver." Google co-founder Sergey Brin added: "Self-driving cars can transform lives and communities?providing transportation to those not currently served, increasing safety on the road, reducing or eliminating congestion, and turning parking into parkland." The bill signed by Brown instructs the state's Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to adopt regulations that govern the licensing, bonding, testing and operation of autonomous vehicle technology. It instructs the DMV to adopt the new regulations as soon as practicable but no later than January 2015, although that is likely to happen in January 2013. Earlier this year, Nevada lawmakers also approved regulations to allow for the operation of self-driving vehicles on the state's roadways. The regulations established the requirements companies must meet to test their vehicles on Nevada's public roadways as well as requirements for residents to legally operate them in the future. Google's fleet of autonomous vehicles has already logged 300,000 test miles (482,800 kilometers) on California's roads and highways. Companies such as Ford and GM are also moving towards fully autonomous vehicles by introducing semi-autonomous features to the market and Volkswagen is working with Stanford University on an autonomous vehicle design. Audi, Volvo and BMW are also working on on autonomous technology.

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