

County of Santa Clara
Supervisory District Three



24-5403

DATE: April 16, 2024 (Item No. 12)
TO: Board of Supervisors
FROM: Otto Lee, Supervisor
Sylvia Arenas, Supervisor
SUBJECT: Resolution in support of Senate Bill 915

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Adopt Resolution supporting Senate Bill (SB) 915 (Cortese), “The Autonomous Vehicle Service Deployment and Data Transparency Act,” and directing the County Executive to send a letter to the members of the County’s Legislative Delegation expressing support for the bill and to include SB 915 in the County’s 2024 Legislative Policies. (Lee/Arenas)

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

Over the last year, driverless vehicles have delayed transport and medical care, blocked emergency vehicles, and interfered during active firefighting and crime scenes. First responders have been forced to relocate their emergency vehicles because of wayward autonomous vehicles. The San Francisco Fire Department has indicated that more than 70 driverless vehicles have interfered with emergency responders in 2023 alone.

Currently, local governments have no authority to establish rules or regulations related to the deployment of autonomous vehicles. Unlike the process for regulating taxicabs, local governments cannot establish rules and regulations around the deployment of autonomous vehicle services. The Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) administers the Autonomous Vehicles and authorizes permits to manufacturers that test and deploy autonomous vehicles. The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) serves as the regulatory body for for-hire transportation services such as taxi cabs and rideshare.

In 2023, the CPUC approved permits for Cruise and Waymo to charge fares for passenger services without a human driver present in San Francisco. Earlier this year, Waymo submitted an application to the CPUC to expand its driverless taxi service to San Mateo County and parts of Santa Clara County, including Palo Alto, Mountain View and Sunnyvale. The DMV gave Waymo approval to operate on highways and city streets from San Francisco to Sunnyvale.

SB 915 would prioritize local control in the decision to deploy autonomous vehicle services. Contingent upon an autonomous vehicle service company receiving approval by the DMV and the CPUC, this bill would prevent deployment in a geographic location until a local government passes an ordinance authorizing operations. The bill is patterned after existing law that provides for local regulation of taxicab companies which requires taxicab companies to have a valid permit to operate in a local jurisdiction. It will help maintain safety for pedestrians, passengers, and other vehicles, while also establishing a community-centered approach.

BACKGROUND

After several collisions involving Cruise vehicles, including one incident in which a Cruise self-driving taxi drove over a pedestrian and pinned them under a car, the DMV suspended their permits, effectively halting their operations completely in California. The DMV noted that it had suspended Cruise's autonomous vehicle deployment and driverless testing permits on the basis that its vehicles were unsafe for public operation and that the manufacturer had misrepresented the safety of its cars.

Last December, the City and County of San Francisco filed a lawsuit against the State of California for "unlawful" authorization of self-driving cars demanding the CPUC reconsider its decision to allow autonomous vehicles to operate 24/7 as paid taxi service.

The counties of Los Angeles, San Francisco and San Mateo and the cities of Oakland and Los Angeles have all adopted similar resolutions in support of SB 915.

The bill is supported by the California Conference Board of The Amalgamated Transit Union, the California Labor Federation, AFL-CIO, California Professional Firefighters, California Teamsters Public Affairs Council, AFSCME CA, and the California School Employees Association, among others.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Resolution Supporting Senate Bill 915