

Automated cars could clog Ontario's old roads, report warns

By Geoff Zochodne - October 28, 2016

Relief will arrive in the form of full automation that would allow vehicles to travel closer together, use narrower lanes, and require less parking.



The dawn of automated vehicles will increase traffic congestion on Ontario's busiest roads and could outpace the province's infrastructure plans, the construction lobby is warning.

A new report commissioned by groups tied to the building and maintenance of Ontario's transportation system suggests the province needs to start preparing itself for waves of automation that are coming, starting with semi-driverless cars. Those vehicles, along with a growing population, will further stress highways in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, the study declares.

"In the 2020-2035 period, semi-automated vehicles will account for a much larger portion of the initial automated market," says the report's author, Toronto-based transportation consultant **Bern Grush**, in a release. "Based on GTHA population growth, congestion will get worse as desirable, semi-automated vehicles encourage outward urban growth, leading to longer commutes and higher parking demand."

Premier **Kathleen Wynne**'s government has boasted it has a 12-year, \$160-billion infrastructure plan in the works, but the report suggests the province may still be falling behind, even as semi-automated cars are bearing down on Ontario.

One of the key findings of the AV study is that "the emerging challenge Ontario faces is that the infrastructure needed for the next 20 years may not be the infrastructure needed thereafter."

"We have done a poor job of scaling and maintaining our transportation infrastructure or at least

poorer than we might have done had we been able to understand in 1975 or 1995 where we would be in 2015," says the report. "Even now with \$160 billion pledged by the Ontario government to be belatedly poured into transportation infrastructure between 2016 and 2028, we are arguably only barely able to catch up to where we should have been decades earlier."

Relief will arrive in the form of fully automated vehicles that would lighten traffic, allowing cars to travel closer to each other and require less parking (and car ownership overall) - but that's not expected to be a reality until at least the mid-2030s. The "utopian" view of driverless cars in the next few years isn't happening, says **Andy Manahan**, executive director of the **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario**, which commissioned the report.

The RCCAO is hoping to stir up a public policy debate around the automated vehicles and get people thinking about the future. Currently, the Ontario government is more focused on personal vehicles, but not so much the trucking and mass transit angles of automation that have been studied elsewhere, Manahan added, citing the report. Those types of driverless transportation open up new avenues of debates around insurance and liability.

"I don't think Ontario has wrapped its head around that," Manahan said. "If Ontario wants to continue to be in this kind of reasonably good state we're in right now, it has to be more of a risk taker in terms of doing pilot projects and encouraging experiments."

Automated vehicles are slowly reaching the mainstream, with major manufacturers and tech companies developing models. Just this week, for example, [a self-driving truck delivered](#) a shipment of Budweiser beer in Colorado. And in Ontario, places such as [Kanata](#) and [Stratford](#) are vying to be the guinea pigs for AV testing.

Ontario's Ministry of Transportation has an automated vehicle pilot project open for business that allows for the testing of the cars, with a driver inside, on the province's roads. However, the government has not approved any participants, said MTO spokesman **Bob Nichols** in an email.

"We're still in the very early stages of a pilot framework that covers a 10 year period," he said "We believe that the regulation we developed, in cooperation with industry stakeholders, meets the needs of industry while protecting road safety in Ontario."

Grush's report says that Ontario isn't the only place in a bind over automated cars, but that questions should be asked about what kind of infrastructure needs to be built. This includes taking into account the pressure applied by automated vehicles.

"All regional public transportation – the GTHA's as much as that of any region in the world – is directly in the crosshairs of mobility digitization," said the report. "Ontario's transportation demands and the systems that sustain it are unlikely to reach stasis in any plannable and fundable future, so that few infrastructure systems being planned will remain suitable for their planned lifecycles."

The report sees potential in driverless cars (particularly public transit vehicles, or personal ones that aren't subsidized), and recommends Ontario "address governance, infrastructure and

programs that promote the widespread urban adoption of shared, fully automated vehicles to reduce the population of personally owned vehicles."

The report also notes that Ontario is home to a big chunk of the automotive and auto parts manufacturing industry, which could be used to build automated vehicles. This could involve tasking the province's automakers with building large fleets of publicly-owned automated buses.

"It is contract programs like this that will give Ontario innovators and manufacturers the impetus they need to innovate, hire, manufacture and export," says the report. "It is also programs like this that will accelerate the schedule to robo-taxis and robo-transit and start to shift the Ontario appetite for transportation infrastructure away from [single-occupant vehicle] dominance toward public transportation."