So When Is It Realistic to Expect Fully Autonomous Vehicles to Become the "Norm"?

Following the Chancellor's Budget in November 2017, which announced ambitious plans to progress electric and driverless vehicles in the UK, with the government aim of seeing "fully self-driving cars, without a human operator, on UK roads by 2021", the CEO of Uber (Dara Khosrowshahi) has this week predicted that driverless cars are "at least a decade away"[1].

Mr Khosrowshahi cited the following reasons for this: firstly, the high cost of the technology used by driverless cars (in particular, the sensors) and secondly, the need to map cities, with Khosrowshahi noting that "we map every city to three centimetres". This will clearly take considerable time and calls into question whether countries are keeping pace with how this data will be processed and stored in the future.

It is difficult to assess whether Mr Khosrowshahi's prediction is cautious or realistic. Recently, it has been reported that Volkswagen is aiming to release a fleet of autonomous taxis to the roads of Silicon Valley by 2021[2], which seems more in line with the timeframe that the UK Chancellor has in mind. However, given that Uber has been a leader in testing autonomous technology to date, Mr Khosrowshahi's comments should certainly be given some credence.

The UK's Autonomous and Electric Vehicles Bill (**A&EV Bill**) is due for its third reading in the House of Commons on 29 January 2018. As we reported during the course of 2017[3], the A&EV Bill proposes to extend mandatory vehicle insurance to cover the use of connected and autonomous vehicles, which is a clear sign that the UK government is gearing up to ensure that there are no barriers to autonomous vehicles hitting the roads in the UK. In addition, in August 2017, the Department for Transport and the Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure released "key principles" in relation to the cybersecurity of smart and connected vehicles. Those principles included guidelines on issues such as data protection and implementing security by design, again, suggesting that the UK is pre-empting the issues that need to be scaled before autonomous vehicles are the norm. Until the government releases more information as to how it proposes to meet its 2021 target, the exact timescale for the arrival of fully self-driving cars remains open to "speculative" prediction.

Contacts

Simon Garbett
Partner, UK Automotive Lead
T +44 121 222 3390
E simon.garbett@squirepb.com

Helen Cain
Associate
T +44 121 222 3309
E helen.cain@squirepb.com

1   "Uber boss says driverless cars are at least a decade away", *The Telegraph*, 22 January 2018
2   "VW and Silicon Valley firm aim to build driverless cars by 2021", *The Local*, 4 January 2018
3   "Developments With the UK's Autonomous and Electric Vehicle Bill", September 2017