

RCCAO applauds Wynne's AV innovation network announcement

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VAUGHAN, ONT. — The province has taken a step forward in supporting autonomous vehicle innovation and construction industry stakeholders are supporting the move.

Premier Kathleen Wynne officially launched the Automated Vehicle Innovation Network (AVIN) in Stratford, Ont. Nov. 10, stating the government will invest \$80 million in the network over the next five years.

The AVIN Demonstration Zone is among the first of its kind in Canada and will allow researchers to hone the technology and test AV in a wide range of everyday, real-life traffic scenarios. The space is intended to help researchers continue to improve this technology.

According to a release issued by the Office of the Premier, the province is partnering with Ontario Centres of Excellence in AVIN, which will bring together industry and academia to capitalize on the economic opportunities of connected and autonomous vehicles, while developing the emerging technology and infrastructure.

The Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario said the investment demonstrates a strong commitment by the province in the development of self-driving vehicles.

"Premier Wynne, Transportation Minister Steven Del Duca and the Ontario government have proven that they are committed to the future," said Andy Manahan, executive director of RCCAO, in a statement. "This announcement is a worthwhile initiative. There is a lot we can learn from conducting pilot tests at AVIN, but there is more to be done to usher in a new era for our roads and for improving mobility."

He added, "Ultimately, Ontario could mitigate traffic congestion through the sharing economy and be a global leader in deployment of self-driving cars. The government must be very forward looking as it makes key decisions on future infrastructure and transit investments."

The province's announcement comes on the heels of a report the RCCAO commissioned entitled Ontario Must Prepare for Vehicle Automation: How Governance Can Influence its Outcome.

The report, which was written by systems engineer and futurist Bern Grush, states that self-driving vehicles will eventually replace entire fleets of taxis and buses in the form of driverless robo-taxis and robo-shuttles.

Grush proposes a governance system that would use analytics, incorporating digital tools to set a subsidy and pricing system, optimize distribution and consider social performance of commercial fleets.

"Vehicle automation will greatly impact Ontario society, and governments have an important role to play in determining how these new technologies fit with our infrastructure and mobility planning," said Manahan in a statement after the report was released.

There are still a lot of unanswered questions, Grush notes, adding he doesn't anticipate fully automated vehicles that can operate without a driver until well after 2050.

"How fast will highly automated AVs (no driver) diffuse into our surface transportation systems?" asked Grush. "So far, the total number is zero, excluding a few partially automated high-end vehicles, which are not the type of AV that can operate without a driver. Will most AVs be privately owned? This will generate sprawl and sustain the demand for parking. Or will most AVs be shared as robo-taxis and robo-shuttles?"

"Right now we do not know what we are building for. This is why we do not know what to build — or when to plan to build it."