

Lynx bus lanes could be autonomous vehicle 'proving ground'



Kaushik Raghu, Senior Staff Engineer at Audi, takes his hands off the steering wheel while demonstrating an Audi self driving vehicle on I-395 expressway in Arlington, Va., Friday, July 15, 2016. (AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais)



By **Marco Santana**

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Orlando-area group lands designation that opens door for automated vehicle research

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LYMMO bus routes in downtown Orlando could some day see self-driving buses, according to Central Florida agencies that are part of a group that helped the region land a designation as a hub for autonomous vehicles.

The recently formed Central Florida Automated Vehicle Partners includes a mix of public universities, including University of Central Florida, along with federal agencies like **NASA** and the City of Orlando.

The group was one of 60 to apply to become one of the U.S. Department of Transportation's 10 "automated vehicle proving grounds."

The timeline for testing automated vehicles on public roadways has not been set, as it will follow simulation-based testing along with tests in controlled environments.

When ready, however, Orlando Deputy Director of Public Works Charles Ramdatt said public transportation lanes used by the city's LYMMO service could be used for live testing.

"Once we get to that point, where we think we can test it safely, we'll do it for different modes of transportation," he said. "Some of that testing will be on our LYMMO routes downtown. We'll test driver-assisted vehicles (first), maybe eventually driverless cars."

The city pursued the designation as a way to potentially attract businesses in the automated vehicle industry to the region, Ramdatt said.

The area has access to closed roads at NASA's facilities on the Space Coast.

Meanwhile, closer to Orlando, Florida Polytechnic University and Florida Department of Transportation plan to open the 2.25-mile SunTrax test track about an hour southwest of downtown Orlando.

The group's application for the designation had to include several factors in the plan, including how safety would be ensured and whether there were controlled environments available for tests.

In its application, the group said SunTrax planning has been completed and that the facility should be open in fall of next year.

University of Central Florida will work to create simulations in virtual worlds that will aim to duplicate how these autonomous vehicles will behave.

In a release announcing the designation, U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary **Anthony Foxx** said the proving grounds chosen will "form a community of practice around safe testing and deployment."

The regions, which include areas like the City of Pittsburgh, San Diego Association of Governments, Iowa City Area Development Group and North Carolina Turnpike Authority, are expected to share best practices as their research advances.

This, Foxx said, will help educate the public and accelerate how quickly these systems can be deployed.

The development of autonomous vehicles represents one of the biggest milestones in transportation in decades, said Dale Cody, a senior vice president at Metric Engineering in Lake Mary.

He said, economically, the research part should be a good thing for the region.

“We are basically going to be leading the next evolution of transportation,” said Cody, whose company employs roughly 300 people. “By creating this, there will be a tremendous opportunity for growth of testing here. Naturally, jobs will follow.”

msantana@orlandosentinel.com or 407-420-5256; Twitter, @marcosantana

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