The state of autonomous vehicles in Saskatchewan

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In our April issue, we examined the state of autonomous vehicles (“AV”) in Alberta from a regulatory standpoint and provided an update on current AV projects in that province. We now continue our journey eastward to examine the current state of AV in Saskatchewan.

Similar to Alberta, Saskatchewan’s AV industry is in the early stages. There is interest to use the larger centres as cities for winter AV testing and there are progressive voices pushing for the industry to advance in the province.

Regulatory and Government Support for Autonomous Vehicles Saskatchewan Government Insurance (“SGI”), the province’s Crown Corporation who administers The Traffic Safety Act, is part of the Canadian Council of Motor and Transport Administrators’ Automated Vehicles Working Group (“CCMTA”), working to develop a regulatory framework around AV. The province is in the initial stages of considering legislative changes to regulate AV which are expected to be introduced in the coming months. It is estimated that the proposed changes would give SGI broad authority to regulate AV and that this legislative change will be followed by more specific regulatory amendments.

Current Projects The most prominent AV project currently under way in Saskatchewan is being developed by DOT Technology Corp. (“DOT”), a Saskatchewan-based company that manufactures autonomous farming technology used for a variety of farming tasks traditionally completed using a tractor. When fully operational, the Dot Power Platform (referred to as “Dot” to distinguish it from the corporation) will operate autonomously, notifying the farmer when it encounters any obstacle in its path. The farmer would view the obstacle through on-board cameras and take over the controls, if necessary, through a tablet. DOT foresees this being a significant advancement in the agriculture industry. If Dot is moving from field to field, and not crossing or using any public roads, then the customer is not subject to any restrictions that may currently be in place. DOT, however, plans to implement a “follow me” feature which would allow Dot to follow behind the farmer’s vehicle to the next field using a public road. This would then put Dot within the scope of the current and likely future legislation. To account for this, DOT has been in discussion with SGI through the initial stages of its product launch and to demonstrate its capabilities, safety, and to address any concerns that a regulatory body may have currently and going forward.

Conclusion While Saskatchewan remains at the preliminary phases of creating AV regulations for public roads, private industries within the province are developing AV in the province, particularly with relation to farming activities. Considering agriculture is one of Saskatchewan's largest contributing industries to its GDP, the impact of AV in that industry could have a substantial impact on the province's economy. Currently, Saskatchewan has one of the lowest rates of public acceptance for AV in Canada, however, as AV become more popular on the farmers' fields across the province, it is likely there will be increased support for AV in the region.

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