

Self-driving vehicle bill comes under fire in committee hearing

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Legislation to regulate fully autonomous vehicles in Wisconsin came under fire during an Assembly committee hearing, as members of the public raised concerns around safety and reliability.

Meanwhile, authors of AB 848 said Wisconsin is falling behind the dozens of other states with similar regulations on the books.

Rep. Dave Maxey, R-New Berlin, testified yesterday before the Assembly Committee on Transportation, arguing Wisconsin's unique weather conditions provide an opportunity for proving self-driving vehicles can operate safely in the state.

"If we can't test these vehicles in all weather conditions, like snow and rain, and with different vehicle types, unfortunately we won't know that they are safe," he said.

The legislation would establish an autonomous driving safety board within the state Department of Transportation as well as a permitting process for companies that want to operate such vehicles in Wisconsin, Maxey said.

Operators would have to meet various registration and insurance requirements under the bill's framework, and the board would be able to designate specific highways for autonomous vehicle operation, he said. The board would also have the power to require safety reports on these vehicles as well as suspend or revoke permits when safety issues occur.

Maxey argued the bill would provide clarity by allowing self-driving vehicles to operate "without facing a patchwork of local restrictions" while also establishing strong safeguards for the technology.

But several speakers from the motorcyclist rights and safety group Abate of Wisconsin spoke against the bill, questioning self-driving vehicles' ability to detect motorcycles, bicyclists and pedestrians. Members of the organization argued public

roadways aren't the appropriate testing ground for these vehicles.

Mike Halvorson, a board member for Abate of Wisconsin, said he's very concerned about his friends and family in the state being "used as an experiment" to improve autonomous vehicles.

"I don't understand why we have to participate," he said yesterday. "If other states like Minnesota and Michigan are willing to let their citizens [be] used as guinea pigs, there are winter roads, all these conditions in Wisconsin are duplicated in these other states ... the data that gets harvested to make these systems better can be got from them."

The bill's co-sponsor, Sen. Rachel Cabral-Guevara, said she views fully autonomous vehicles as "the way of the future," arguing the technology will be coming to Wisconsin at some point.

"Right now, 35 other states have this in some capacity. We do not," she said.

Maxey also said autonomous vehicles have the potential to expand transportation options for those who currently lack reliable access, pointing to older adults, people with disabilities and residents of rural areas.

"At the same time, this bill helps Wisconsin stay competitive," he said. "States like Texas and California and Minnesota are already using testing, or deploying autonomous vehicles and seeing benefits from early regulation."

Watch the [video](#).