

February 6, 2020

The Honorable Kumar P. Barve
Chairman, House Environment and Transportation Committee
251 House Office Building
Annapolis MD 21401

***Re: Letter of Support – House Bill 174 – Motor Vehicle Offenses – Following Too Closely
– Application to Trucks***

Dear Chairman Barve and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) supports House Bill 174 in order to enable the operation of commercial automated truck platooning in the state and realize the significant potential safety, economic, and infrastructure benefits on Maryland’s roadways.

House Bill 174 exempts trucks traveling in a unified manner at electronically connected speeds from the requirement to leave enough room for an overtaking vehicle to enter the space between them. The bill further specifies that connected trucks are still subject to the requirement to operate in a reasonable and prudent manner consistent with the speed of other vehicles, traffic, and roadway conditions.

Lifting the statutory prohibition on “following too closely” for electronically connected trucks removes a barrier to the deployment of commercial automated truck platoons on Maryland roadways. Commercial automated truck platooning in Maryland can result in improvements in the areas of safety, environment, commerce, and infrastructure

Truck platooning utilizes vehicle-to-vehicle communications technology hosted by radar, GPS, and Wi-Fi to allow two or more vehicles to communicate with one another. When electronically connected, a lead vehicle operated by a qualified driver, is followed closely by one or more vehicles, which are also operated by drivers, that accelerate and brake together to assist driving.

MDOT Motor Vehicle Administration (MDOT MVA) holds ensuring the safety of Maryland’s roadways as it’s preeminent responsibility. Research has shown that 94 percent of crashes involve human error. The adaptive cruise control systems used to control truck platoons wirelessly communicate information on braking, speed, and oncoming obstacles, allowing the following trucks to have more consistent and predictable driving behavior than non-platooned

trucks. The use of automated speed and distance management systems drastically reduces the reaction time of the following trucks in a platoon, thereby reducing the likelihood of rear-end or chain-reaction crashes.

Truck platooning also lowers fuel consumption by reducing aerodynamic drag and producing more consistent speed. The US Department of Energy has estimated 65 percent of all long-haul truck miles could possibly be platooned, which would represent a 4 percent decrease in truck fuel consumption. Commercial auto makers currently engaging in testing of truck platooning have reported increases in fuel efficiency by 4.5 percent for the lead truck, and 10 percent for all following vehicles in the convoy.

Further, truck platooning may assist in addressing resource issues in the commercial trucking industry, and capacity issues on our roadways. In July 2019, the American Trucking Association (ATA) reported a nation-wide industry shortage of over 60,800 drivers. According to the American Transportation Research Institute, in 2016, truck drivers sat in traffic for nearly 1.2 billion hours, equivalent to more than 425,000 drivers sitting idle for a year. With demands for shipping so drastically outpacing availability, increasing efficiency through fewer fuel stops and less time lost through traffic crashes, could help these carriers to transport more goods with existing resources. By reducing following distance between trucks, commercial carriers not only reap efficiencies, but incremental increases to roadway capacity can be realized, using existing infrastructure to reduce traffic.

By removing barriers to the deployment of CAV systems in the state, Maryland is poised to attract investments in efforts to develop innovative transportation technologies, capitalizing on the groundwork Maryland's CAV working group has already laid for the safe testing and deployment of CAV technology. Twenty (20) states, including Pennsylvania, have taken steps to authorize automated truck platooning by addressing following too closely laws, and Maryland is well-positioned with the I-95 and I-81 corridors to participate in the advancement of this technology. In addition to Pennsylvania's recent progress, Virginia has also been actively engaged in testing truck platooning on public roadways. Bringing Maryland in line with our northern and southern neighbors would create a cohesive mid-Atlantic corridor for the deployment of platooning technology, and allow Maryland to collaborate with federal partners at the U.S. Department of Transportation who are interested in formalizing a partnership with the state for the further development of platooning technologies.

In authorizing automated truck platooning, Maryland stands as a lynchpin in a regional effort to create momentum in this innovative transportation solution which can help address critical safety, environmental, and capacity issues. For these reasons, the Maryland Department of Transportation respectfully requests the Committee's favorable report on House Bill 174.

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Respectfully submitted,

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