January 14, 2021

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis MD 21401

Re: Letter of Support – Senate Bill 291 – Motor Vehicle Offenses – Following Too Closely – Unified Truck Travel

Dear Chairman Smith and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) supports Senate Bill 291 in order to enable the operation of driver-assisted truck platooning in the state and realize the significant safety, economic, and infrastructure benefits possible on Maryland's roadways.

Senate Bill 291 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 commercial deployment of driver-assisted truck platoons on Maryland roadways. Driver-assisted truck platooning in Maryland can result in improvements in the areas of safety, environment, commerce, and infrastructure. In Maryland, as elsewhere, the importance of trucking and freight delivery has been highlighted during these trying times of COVID-19 changes, which makes it even more important to provide every available tool to our truckers and trucking companies.

Truck platooning utilizes vehicle-to-vehicle communications technology hosted by radar, GPS, and Wi-Fi to allow two or more vehicles to be electronically synced with one another. The lead vehicle is operated by a qualified driver, and the follow-on trucks in the platoon have the brakes and throttle handled by technology and still have a qualified driver in position for steering and monitoring the road environment.

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 technology used to control truck platoons wirelessly communicates 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. In fact, the platooning technology reacts for braking in a tenth of a second, compared with two full seconds for a human to react.

Truck platooning also lowers fuel consumption by reducing aerodynamic drag and producing more consistent speed. The U. S. 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 the following trucks.

Further, truck platooning may assist in addressing resource issues in the commercial trucking industry, and capacity issues on our roadways. In October 2020, American Transportation Research Institute (ATRI) named driver shortage as the top overall concern for the trucking industry for the fourth year in a row, and the American Trucking Association (ATA) confirmed this ATRI report as identifying the issues most important to the trucking industry.[i] The nationwide truck driver shortage is expected to be 175,000 drivers short by 2024.[ii] 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 connected and automated vehicle (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. Approximately half the states, including Pennsylvania, have passed laws to authorize truck platooning, representing a significant proportion of the country's annual truck traffic. Maryland is well-positioned with the I-95 and I-81 corridors to participate in the advancement of this technology. Pennsylvania passed platooning legislation in 2018, has several companies engaged in platooning, and a few months ago, completed a successful collaborative effort with Ohio and Michigan to run truck platoons on several routes through each of the three states. 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 its 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 removing restrictions to truck platooning, Maryland has an opportunity to create momentum in a regional effort 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 grant Senate Bill 291 a favorable report.

Respectfully submitted,

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[i] https://www.thetrucker.com/trucking-news/business/driver-shortage-tops-atris-2020-list-of-top-trucking-industry-issues-for-motor-carriers-insurance-makes-lists-for-first-time-since-2005

[ii] https://www.law360.com/articles/1334034/challenges-for-the-autonomous-trucking-industry-part-1; Challenges For The Autonomous Trucking Industry: Part 1, *By Michael Jaeger, Emanuel McMiller and Elsa Bullard*