

Testimony of John Q. Murray
House of Representatives Committee on Transportation
March 28, 2012

Mr. Chairman, Madame Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of HR 163 / HCR 212.

During our lifetimes, we have seen tremendous advances in technology. We have landed men on the moon and built a series of devices to probe the fundamental particles of matter. In our daily lives, just to name one particular example, we have seen bulky rotary telephones connected by copper lines replaced with digital wireless devices that fit in our pockets. At one time, entire specialized industries centered around planning and constructing and laying those copper telephone lines. Enormous resources were dedicated to this effort. If you had told those specialists that all that work would one day be discarded, and that most people would use mobile phones, they would have laughed or responded that such an advance was in the far distant future. And yet today, the latest statistics show that one in four phone users have discarded landlines entirely and use only their mobile phones.

I would like to commend the Hawai'i Legislature for having the foresight to begin considering rules for autonomous vehicles. I would also encourage the Legislature to start considering guidelines for the land that may be reclaimed from all rights of way when most or all cars in Hawai'i are autonomous vehicles.

As the Google project leaders have said, autonomous vehicles allow for more efficient use of resources. Most roads, to allow for drivers' relatively slow response times, are 80 to 90 percent empty. Autonomous cars can drive closer to each other, making more efficient use of this space. When all cars are autonomous, the amount of space dedicated to roads can be reduced without reducing overall traffic volume. We will be able to reduce today's four-lane roads to three lanes or even two lanes and still see less traffic congestion.

The Google project leaders also suggest that this new technology will allow changes in our parking needs. After depositing you at work, the autonomous vehicle can drive itself to a multi-level parking garage at a dispersed site, and await its summons to pick you up. An autonomous vehicle could drop off visitors at one end of a shopping area and pick them up several blocks away. Valuable real estate on every street that is today dedicated to parking can be reclaimed for other purposes. As more vehicles become autonomous vehicles, we may choose to convert most of the transportation grid into one-way streets and reclaim even more paved lands from the public roadways.

The roads and streets currently available for public use thus represent property that could become available to private owners. While the value of this land is immediately evident when considering such high-end real estate as Honolulu's Ala Moana Boulevard or Beretania Street or Kuhio Avenue, the amount of land that could be reclaimed in the aggregate is truly breathtaking. As this new technology advances, we could have the opportunity to reclaim one-third to one-half of all paved roadways on the islands, and our governments may choose to sell, auction, or lease that land to private owners. We may also choose to retain that public land, but remove all that concrete and asphalt and do something else with that land.

What can and should be done with that land? Today, before the first autonomous vehicle has taken to Hawaii's roads, we have an opportunity to discuss, design, and select the outcome. The Legislature is

the proper venue to begin this discussion.

I applaud your current efforts on HR 163 / HR 212 and encourage passage.

Thank you for enabling informed decisions in the public interest as we adopt new technology.

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