

Remarks by Armin Samii
Better Streets Lawrenceville (PA)
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Safety leaders, victims' advocates and others will voice their concerns about legislation on autonomous vehicles (AVs) which does not include needed safeguards and regulations to protect all road users

Public Comments from Armin Samii, a bicycling safety advocate. He lives in Pittsburgh, a city that served as the headquarters to top AV companies, including Uber ATG, Aurora, Argo AI, and Motional. He is the chair of Better Streets Lawrenceville, a neighborhood bike/pedestrian safety group, and has spent time working in the AV industry as a technical manager of teams that included Remote Guidance, Offboard Data Visualizations, and User Experience.

I don't own a car, so I walk, bike, and take the bus to get almost everywhere. Pittsburgh has a few bike paths, but most of the time I'm biking with traffic, and relying on the empathy and courtesy of human drivers to keep me safe. We make eye contact, we wave each other on, and we yield to each other when it makes sense to.

Autonomous Vehicles are unable to communicate with the same courtesy and empathy. Despite my familiarity, I often find myself in conflict with them while biking in Pittsburgh. On more than one occasion, I approached an intersection at the same time as an AV. I could not tell if it was yielding to me or not. I would start moving, the AV would start at the same time. We'd both stop, and this game of chicken would repeat until I got honked at by an annoyed human driver behind me.

We all know that an annoyed driver is one step away from a dangerous driver. Even though I never felt at risk of getting hit by the AV, I did feel like the AV was putting me in a dangerous situation. These interactions are small, but they are scary. If even I couldn't predict the vehicle's behavior, how do we expect the general public to do so?

Of course, I do believe that this particular company would have solved those issues *eventually* – but that's not the point. The point is that without regulation, each company deploying AVs is free to decide for themselves what "safe enough" is. My fear is without additional regulation, "safe enough" might be limited to "what are we legally liable for," and not an inch more. In the meantime, vulnerable road users are disproportionately at risk.

Let me make this concrete: when you're passing a bicyclist in Pennsylvania, you must give them four feet of space. But what happens if you're about to pass them at a railroad crossing? A bicyclist needs to cross the railroad tracks at a 90-degree angle, and might need extra space to do so. Most drivers understand this and will have the courtesy to wait a moment before passing. In the absence of regulation, will AV companies make the same decision? After all, if they gave

the mandated four feet, is it the AVs fault if the bicyclist gets caught in the railroad tracks and falls?

The rules of our road today are built for humans, who have empathy, courtesy, and common sense. For AVs, which have none of this, we need regulations to fill the gap.