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# Hands up for going driverless



**CHRISTOPHER RUSSELL**  
OPINION

SOUTH Australia has an opportunity to seize pole position nationally in a technology that will make radical changes to the way people live in cities worldwide over the next few decades.

The technology is the introduction of driverless cars.

A paper published last week by global consultancy McKinsey & Co makes remarkable predictions about the impact of the technology.

Driverless and shared vehicles coupled with ride sharing could reduce the car fleet in a city such as New York by 80 per cent, according to work by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The reduction in the fleet would have far-reaching effects such as easing congestion – and therefore cutting travel time – and allowing the hectares of land and floor space in CBDs now allocated to parking spaces to be released for use as shops, offices, recreation and residences.

Most compelling are the prospects for safer driving. At the moment, about 1.2 million people a year are killed in road accidents around the world.

Researchers at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and other institutions expect the transition to go in stages – first an expansion of existing technology such as park-assist or following the car in front in congested traffic, then adoption by commercial fleets and then widespread acceptance.

There is a long way to go –

on both the technical and legal side. Only a few jurisdictions have a legal framework that allows driverless vehicles on the roads and there is still much work to be done on issues of insurance and liability.

On the technical side, South Australia is already a world leader through the work of Cohda Wireless. A spin-off from the UniSA, Cohda has developed technology for vehicles to “talk” to each other and interact with infrastructure.

Cohda software is being used in the next generation of General Motors vehicles, due in the market by 2017.

The November 7-8 road trials on the Southern Expressway and related conference announced by Transport Minister Stephen Mullighan last month should be just one step for the technology in SA.

To say the idea is a distraction from the real job of government is extremely short-sighted.

Any decent government must be able to work across multiple issues simultaneously.

In SA’s case, it’s even more important to test bold, adventurous ideas because the state needs points of difference rather than simply being a mediocre regional administration.

Adelaide’s smaller size and existing strengths in electronics and automotive manufacturing provide a base to develop the technology.

The city’s grid street pattern is often cited by the Government as a reason toll roads won’t work – there’s always an alternative route a block or two away. This could be turned to advantage for driverless cars, such as creating dedicated routes on some arterials at some times.

We could, of course, just sit

back and wait for someone else to develop the systems and then pay them for the licences.

But, why not get in there first, get it right and sell our expertise to the world.

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