

Testimony at City Council 5/15/19 Re: Knight Foundation AV grant

My name is Laura Wiens, and I'm the Director of Pittsburghers for Public Transit.

I'll start by quoting a New York Times article from 2016 about Pittsburgh inviting AV testing:

The article reads "So with the world watching, what has the city of 306,000 done to prepare for Uber's unprecedented test? The answer is not much. There have been no public service announcements or demonstrations of the technology. Except the mayor and one police official, no other top city leader has seen a self-driving Uber vehicle operate up close...

Mayor Bill Peduto said, "It's not our role to throw up regulations or limit companies like Uber. You can either put up red tape or roll out the red carpet. "

You can guess which path we have taken. ***And what a red carpet, huh?*** For the last three years, we have had 5 autonomous vehicles companies using our public roadways as a test track without regulatory frameworks, with no revenue for the city, and no data-sharing agreements in place. And in those three years the city hasn't hosted a single frank conversation with residents about the implications of AVs, how they threaten 10 million jobs in the U.S. with no just transition plan, how in the best case scenario they will only improve pedestrian safety and provide any environmental benefit 30 years down the road and in the meanwhile will likely cause greater harm; how AVs will exacerbate urban sprawl and mobility inequities for low-income riders and riders with disabilities; how their business model is predicated on data sharing on rider movement and advertising.

In the midst of this extraordinary opportunity for companies to test their unproven technology with impunity, DOMI rolls out another red carpet, this one at a cost of \$23 million taxpayer dollars. That's the cost of just the AV roadway infrastructure for this so-called Mon-Oakland Connector, and doesn't account for countless hours of city staff time and the staggering cost-per-ride that will be incurred in operating expenses for the proposed AV micro-transit shuttle. That same 23 million dollars could have directly gone to the mobility and pedestrian safety improvements that residents in Hazelwood, Greenfield, Glen Hazel and South Oakland have actually been calling for: Sidewalks. Crosswalks. Potholes patched. Bus shelters. Lighting. Bus lanes. Bike lanes. Weekend transit service on the 93.

Pittsburgh is supposedly "all-In" for equitable development. If we are heavily subsidizing a so-called public transit solution, why would it be for a short-term luxury service that is intended to serve primarily academics and developers? Why wouldn't we instead provide a long-term, sustainable transit solution for our most mobility-disenfranchised residents?

Finally, I'll just say this about the Knight Foundation grant. We at PPT believe in democratic public processes, and engaging residents around the issues and the solutions, so we're all about having community conversations. But beginning from a framework of "educating" residents about why AVs are the solutions for their needs is PR work, not community engagement. Let AV companies look out for their own interests. The City should be investing in looking out for ours.