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From the Mayor's Desk

Why the City is Investing in Autonomous Vehicle Technology

Those of us who have lived in Peachtree Corners for a number of years know that Technology Park has long been synonymous with cutting-edge technology. Four decades ago Tech Park was the center of the technology world in the Atlanta metro area. Innovators such as Dennis Hayes, famous for his work in developing computer modems, established businesses here.

The world of technology is ever evolving. Now a new wave of technology is taking over – and not only here in the U.S. but worldwide -- the emerging technology that is driving the autonomous vehicle industry. The city has already committed significant resources on multi-modal transportation options – and now has made the decision to be a pioneer in investing in the future of the autonomous vehicle technology industry.

I'm sure many of you have questions about the city's decision to invest \$2 million, a sizeable sum, indeed, on autonomous vehicle research and development for our city. Let me explain by using a question and answer format:

Q: It doesn't seem like that our city should be investing in research and development for the AV industry. Shouldn't this be a decision for a private enterprise?

A: The council's decision was based on providing economic development opportunities for our city. By developing an AV test track, our city will be in a leading position to attract the myriad of emerging industries that will be part of the AV industry. Keeping our city viable and attractive to emerging businesses result in more jobs for our citizens, fills office space and underpins the property values of our homes.

Q: Is there really a need? It seems like autonomous vehicles are really a very futuristic idea.

A: Thirteen of the world's 14 largest automakers have announced plans to bring Autonomous Vehicles to market so the idea of this technology is not a matter of if – but when.

Q: Where will the test track be located and how will it be used?

A: The 1.4-mile test track and AV shuttle will run along Technology Parkway, beginning at Spalding Drive and ending at Peachtree Parkway. The test track will provide a means to test and evaluate next-generation modes of transportation. The emphasis will not be on the shuttle or ridership but the track itself which will be used for designing and testing new AV technology.

Q: Will the city's startup incubator, Prototype Prime, be involved in some way?

A: Yes, Prototype Prime, which is located on Technology Parkway, ½ mile from City Hall, will be collaborating with the project by launching an Advanced Vehicle Accelerator to foster collaboration among companies within the advanced vehicle ecosystem. It will be partnering with Tech Connect Hub, which will assist in matching research and startup communities with corporate partners.

Q: Would you elaborate on what type of industries the autonomous vehicle industry is expected to attract?

A: Self-driving vehicles will employ sensors, cameras, radar, high performance GPS, light detection and ranging (LIDAR) artificial intelligence. With a test track readily available, it will undoubtedly attract new and existing AV companies to Peachtree Corners.

Q: Why doesn't the city just spend the money on paving our streets and improving traffic?

A: Technology Parkway was already scheduled for resurfacing within the next couple of years so some of the cost of putting in this track was already in the budget. We will continue to pave streets and work on improving traffic, but it's imperative that we continue planning for our future. We have had people tell us that collectively, Peachtree Corners can fill the shoes of the late Paul Duke, who originally conceived Technology Park. Mr. Duke created the concept of Peachtree Corners. Now we hope to add more value to what he anticipated as we work to bring more economic development to our city.

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