



## Hillsborough County continues with plan to test AVs in Downtown Tampa

Insights

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Downtown Tampa could soon see autonomous vehicles rolling through downtown streets. The Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority operations and safety committee unanimously approved moving forward with a one-year contract between the authority and vendor Beep Inc. to test autonomous vehicles (AVs) in downtown Tampa. While a few other communities around the country have AVs that run in designated lanes, this would be a major step forward for the autonomous vehicle movement in Hillsborough County, Florida.

If implemented, this plan would provide a new convenient method for residents to traverse downtown Tampa. AV shuttles would travel along the Marion Street transit corridor in downtown Tampa. They can hold up to eight people and travel up to 16 miles per hour.

The contract requires Beep to have a person in the AV to operate it manually if needed. Beep currently has a fleet of vehicles in Orlando, and the Jacksonville Transportation Authority recently partnered with the company to use autonomous vehicles to transport COVID-19 tests collected at a drive-thru location at the Mayo Clinic there.

Although the contract is fully funded by the Florida Department of Transportation, there was some hesitancy to move forward because COVID-19 has depleted foot traffic and the number of passengers using public transportation in downtown Tampa. This could cause the results of ridership for the AV service to be low. However, the pilot program could launch in early July and is expected to still be successful due to an analysis data from ridership demands in downtown Tampa.

As previously discussed on our AV blog, transit authorities will want to closely monitor the testing of AVs for public transportation purposes. Besides the obvious safety aspect of any such program, it is imperative to consider the labor implications. When a transit authority considers automation, a duty to bargain with labor over the decision to automate and a duty to bargain over the effects of the decision may arise. In fact, the Transportation Trades Department is already pushing to require transit agencies to provide employees with advanced notice of any planned deployment of automated vehicle technologies and the impact these technologies will have on their current workforce.

An employer contemplating automation changes in the future should look to negotiate provisions reserving such decisions to management when first negotiating or renegotiating its collective bargaining agreements. Additionally, employers should monitor the progress of AV services in order

to ensure that their policies and procedures related to data privacy, confidential information, remote work, and workplace safety are adequately up to date to address potential issues that may arise due employees being able to work while traveling.

### ***Related People***

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