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Dear Caroline,

Automated passenger services permitting in London

Thank you for your letter of 4 June 2026 to Simon Lightwood about the Committee's investigation into automated passenger vehicles in London. I am grateful for the opportunity to provide written evidence, and I welcome the Committee's work in this important area.

The Government is committed to enabling the safe deployment of automated vehicles, while ensuring robust safety, security and regulatory oversight. London is likely to play a leading role in early deployments, and we recognise the importance of effective collaboration with Transport for London (TfL) and the Greater London Authority (GLA).

I have set out below responses to the questions you posed directly in your letter. I have also attached at **ANNEX A** our broader response to the Committee's call for evidence.

1. What process is being followed by your department in assessing whether permission is granted to operators of autonomous passenger services to carry out trials without passengers in London?

The Department's approach to trialling automated vehicles without passengers is supported by the Code of Practice for Automated Vehicle Trialling (the Code). This provides a permissive, non-statutory framework to facilitate innovation while maintaining safety and has supported and facilitated a wide range of trial types, from early-stage testing through to more advanced trials of highly automated systems.

The Code allows organisations to trial automated vehicle technologies on public roads across Great Britain (GB) without the need for a bespoke permitting regime, provided they comply with existing road traffic legislation. This includes ensuring that vehicles are roadworthy, appropriately insured, and operated in a manner consistent with legal requirements. Where an organisation would wish to carry passengers in a trial, the Code is clear in setting out that the trial must comply with the appropriate regulatory requirements.

Under the Code, and in line with the law, trialling organisations must ensure that there is always a suitably competent individual, holding the appropriate category of driving licence, who is ready, able, and willing to take control if required. The Code also sets out expectations for training of those individuals. In addition, they are expected to develop and maintain robust safety cases, including clear risk management processes tailored to their proposed trial.

The Code of Practice also sets clear expectations around engagement and transparency. Trialling organisations are encouraged to work closely with relevant local authorities, including TfL, as well as enforcement bodies and emergency services. They are also expected to maintain appropriate data recording systems and to support the sharing of safety-relevant information to promote continuous improvement and public confidence.

While the Code is not legally binding, it plays an important role in establishing good practice. Compliance with its provisions may be taken into account in the event of incidents or legal proceedings, and it therefore operates as an important complement to the legislative framework.

Taken together, this approach has enabled the UK to support a wide range of automated vehicle trials in real-world conditions, while ensuring that safety, accountability, and public confidence remain central considerations. The Code of Practice is kept under review by the Department.

2. TfL has informed us that Automated Passenger Services permits are issued by the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) and that as part of this process TfL would be requested by the DVSA to consent or not.

a) What process would need to be followed to for the DVSA to grant an Automated Passenger Services permit?

b) Why is TfL a consenting authority, not the licensing authority, for Automated Passenger Services permits in London under the current permitting framework? Are there any plans to change this?

Under the current framework, TfL acts as a consenting authority rather than the licensing authority in London. This reflects both the recommendation of the Law Commissions, and the national structure established by the Automated Vehicles Act 2024 and associated secondary legislation, whereby:

- DVSA, on behalf of the Secretary of State for Transport as the appropriate national authority, provides a consistent, national approach to operator permitting; and,
- local traffic authorities, including TfL and appropriate London Boroughs, are given a formal role to consider local impacts and suitability.

The Law Commissions' review noted that existing categories of licensing are ill-suited to vehicles operating with no driver. For example, differences between a car club and private hire break down where a vehicle supplied to a customer can drive itself to the designated destination. In addition, licensing requirements would need to be specifically adapted for self-driving and impact on safety. The need for consistency and expertise was a key reason behind the recommendation.

The current framework approach ensures that:

- safety standards are applied consistently across GB; and,

- local authorities retain appropriate influence over deployment in their areas, including network management and alignment with local transport strategies.

The government recognises that London has a unique and complex transport environment. We will continue to work closely with TfL and the GLA to ensure the framework operates effectively. At present, there are no plans to change these roles, but the framework will be kept under review as deployments scale.

3. What are the practical implications of the Automated Vehicles (Permits for Automated Passenger Services) Regulations 2026 for the granting of licences to operate commercial passenger services in London?

The Automated Vehicles (Permits for Automated Passenger Services) Regulations 2026 set out the procedural aspects for the permitting scheme, as introduced through Part 5 of the Automated Vehicles Act 2024 (the Act).

This regulation coming into effect on 15 May made it possible for an application to be made for an automated passenger services (APS) permit.

The Act empowers the appropriate national authority to make regulations setting out:

- the application process
- fees payable through the permitting scheme
- the maximum period for which a permit can be valid
- how and in what circumstances a permit can be varied, suspended or withdrawn
- the process for renewing a permit
- how a decision can be appealed
- the disclosure and use of information related to conditions attached to a permit

The appropriate national authority for taxi- and private hire vehicle-like services in England and bus-like services in GB is the Secretary of State for Transport. As outlined in question 2, the DVSA will be undertaking this role on his/her behalf.

These regulations do not prescribe the procedure for making or determining applications. Instead, the government has published non-statutory guidance on how to make applications and the approach to assessing them, which can be found at the following link: www.gov.uk/government/publications/self-driving-vehicle-pilot-scheme-information-for-applicants/self-driving-vehicle-pilot-scheme-information-for-applicants.

I wish you well with your call for evidence and look forward to seeing the outcome of your investigations.

Yours sincerely,

SIMON CONNICK