

WILL DRIVERLESS BE LEFT RUDDERLESS?

The ramifications of a no-deal Brexit have been discussed in forensic detail and at Methuselah-esque length – yet, to date, the impact of total EU severance on autonomous vehicles hasn't got a look in. Here this wrong is righted



With 29 March 2019 looming on the horizon and efforts to finalise a deal still very much in progress, the best any business can do right now is be informed and be prepared for any eventuality.

It's already been documented that Britain's departure from the EU threatens the country's market for electric vehicles, with a no-deal scenario undermining incentives for carmakers to push sales in the UK. But other areas are affected too. The prospect of barriers to free trade of both components and finished vehicles have been widely discussed, but UK development of connected and autonomous vehicles is also likely to suffer through reduced access to multi-national EU research projects.

The UK government has pledged to support British participants in existing projects, but future access is likely to become more restricted and a new framework will need to be agreed with the UK's European neighbours. But there are not only funding concerns – many fear the impact of Brexit and



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possible immigration and work restrictions on attracting talent to the UK at a time when there is already a skills shortage in the sector. Likewise, vehicle type approvals issued by the UK would no longer be valid for the EU market. Many are concerned that having to obtain a separate approval for the UK market would discourage developers from focusing investment in Britain.

NO GOODNIGHT VIENNA

Perhaps with a view to UK residents needing to obtain international driving permits to drive in the EU, the UK government chose March 2018 to complete the sign-up process for the 1968 Vienna Convention on Road Traffic – ensuring full membership by Brexit day. The UK had already signed up to the older (1949) Geneva Convention, but Vienna is needed for most EU countries.

When it comes to innovation in the industry, some commentators have argued that the newer Vienna Convention is more restrictive than its predecessor regarding the development of autonomous vehicles. Could agreeing to it could tie the UK's hands in legislating for driverless vehicles? Well, conventions require

every moving vehicle to have a driver who retains control at all times, but the definition of 'driver' is different with Vienna leaving out the possible alternative of a person "in actual physical control" of the vehicle.

However, the UK government policy paper on ratification suggests that Vienna membership, far from being injurious to our driverless ambitions, will help the UK to shape development of the rules necessary to support the transition to a driverless future.

We all know it will take a global effort to get driverless cars on the roads – and, although progress is slow, the UN Global Forum for Road Traffic Safety has this topic regularly on the agenda and is looking to adapt the Vienna Convention to an autonomous future by altering the 'driver' role to encompass properly approved control systems. If suitable amendments are achieved then there will be a degree of clarity in the Vienna Convention that is missing from Geneva. Furthermore, whilst a no-deal Brexit would present unwelcome challenges for UK innovators in this space, discussions at international level will set the global agenda. And it is full involvement in this process that will likely be more important for the UK in the long term.