



Department
for Transport

Bill Esterson MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

From the Parliamentary
Under Secretary of State
Anthony Browne MP

Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

Tel: 0300 330 3000
E-Mail: anthony.browne@dft.gov.uk

Web site: www.gov.uk/dft

15 April 2024

Dear Bill,

Following the recent Committee debate on the Automated Vehicles Bill held on 19 March, I am writing to provide further clarity on the points raised regarding so-called “pavement bots”.

Pavement bots are known internally to the Department as Micro Vehicles with Automated Technology (MVATs). MVATs are emerging technologies that capture a wide range of types and use cases, such as pavement delivery vehicles, but can be anything smaller than a small hatchback car.

The Government welcomes innovation and the benefits automated vehicles can bring to the country. This is why we have prioritised the Automated Vehicles Bill. This Bill covers all “road vehicles”, meaning mechanically propelled vehicles intended or adapted for use on roads. The legal definition of “roads” includes the pavement with the use of vehicles on pavements limited through the 1835 Highway Act which prohibits 'carriages' being driven on the footpath. A vehicle would only be authorised as self-driving if it were lawful as a motor vehicle. If an MVAT were to operate legally as a motor vehicle, it would be in scope of the Bill.

The Bill aims to regulate self-driving, ensuring safety and accountability; it does not cover other legislative challenges that vehicles may encounter.

While it is for the courts to decide, we see no reason for MVATs not to be considered as mechanically propelled vehicles designed for use on the road

under GB law. If so, then they are subject to legal requirements that apply to motor vehicles.

During the debate, your colleague Simon Lightwood stated that any regulation would need to “*ensure that [pavement delivery robots] do not negatively affect disabled people, or that they are regulated only on pavements that are wide enough*”. I can reassure you that the impact on disabled people will be one of the areas considered as part of the research the Department is planning into MVATs.

More specifically, this research will be focused on:

- understanding the safety of MVATs used on pavements;
- gaining insight into how these technologies affect the safety of key groups, including vulnerable road users; and
- understanding the risks and opportunities surrounding MVATs.

My department plans to begin this research in the next 12 months, with the project expected to run for 6 to 9 months. The results are expected to be published in line with the Government research protocols, particularly those relating to commercial confidentiality. The research will inform any future considerations about the use of MVATs on the pavement.

I will place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anthony Browne". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

ANTHONY BROWNE MP

MINISTER FOR DECARBONISATION, AVIATION AND TECHNOLOGY