

Self-driving cars, also called autonomous vehicles, use sensors, cameras, and artificial intelligence to drive themselves. These are able to detect their surroundings, following traffic rules, and responding to risks, with the aim of improving road safety and comfort. They create significant legal and ethical considerations, regarding who is held responsible in the situation of an accident. Should the car's manufacturer, software developers, or the driver be held responsible?

In the UK, the Automated and Electric Vehicles Act 2018 states that if a self-driving car crashes, the insurance company is responsible for the damages, regardless of who was driving at the time¹. However, if the accident was caused by a system failure, the insurer may seek reimbursement from the car manufacturer. The Automated Vehicles Bill [HL] 2023-24 aims to introduce Authorized Self-Driving Entities, which will be responsible for the actions of their self-driving cars².

Experts say that manufacturers and software developers must ensure the safety of their systems, and that they should be held responsible for any failures³. Additionally, legal reforms are being proposed to create a balance between guaranteeing public safety and encouraging technological advancement⁴. Recent discussions emphasize the changing safety and policy concerns that self-driving cars present, highlighting the necessity for adaptive rules to manage these issues effectively⁵.

As self-driving cars become more common, establishing clear legal responsibility for accidents will be important. This proposal investigates how UK laws are changing to protect the public interest while adopting technology innovations.

¹ *Automated and Electric Vehicles Act 2018* (2018a). UK Government.

² *Automated Vehicles Bill* HL Bill (2023-24) 1, cl 1

³ Sanitt, A., Daddar, S. and Evans, M. (2017) *Autonomous vehicles: The legal landscape of DSRC in the United Kingdom*, *Autonomous vehicles: United Kingdom / Global law firm / Norton Rose Fulbright*. Available at: <https://www.nortonrosefulbright.com/en/knowledge/publications/85e2f81c/autonomous-vehicles-the-legal-landscape-of-dsrc-in-the-united-kingdom> (Accessed: 19 October 2024).

⁴ Marchbold (2022) *Legal reforms to allow safe introduction of Automated Vehicles announced*, *Law Commission*. Available at: <https://lawcom.gov.uk/legal-reforms-to-allow-safe-introduction-of-automated-vehicles-announced/> (Accessed: 19 October 2024).

⁵ MacCarthy, M. (2024) *The evolving safety and policy challenges of self-driving cars*, *Brookings*. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-evolving-safety-and-policy-challenges-of-self-driving-cars/> (Accessed: 22 October 2024).