

Testimony on MNDOT CAV program before the
Minnesota Senate Transportation Committee

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The PLUM Catalyst, LLC

Thank you Chair Dibble and Members of the Committee.

My name is Tammy Meehan Russell, and I am the Founder & Chief Catalyst of The PLUM Catalyst, a strategy and social innovation consulting firm based here in Minnesota with offices in Afton and Grand Rapids.

I have the privilege of serving on the Governor's Council for Connected & Automated Vehicles and co-chairing the Committee on Safe Testing of CAV.

My company's efforts are centered around our mission of advancing the research and deployment of emerging transportation technologies that save lives, improve accessibility, promote sustainability, and grow our future workforce. Of note and very relevant today, is that The PLUM Catalyst is the Project Manager for the goMARTI project, an Automated Vehicle pilot program that has been operational in Grand Rapids, Minnesota since October of 2022, providing nearly 20,000 rides to date, and now averaging approximately 1200 rides per month.

I'd like to start by asking you a few questions:

- How many people in your district are disabled or have reached a point in their life where they can no longer drive?
- How many people don't have transportation to get to a doctor's appointment or cannot get to a grocery store?
- How many people would love to go to their local high school football game on a Friday night, or church on Sunday, or meet a friend for coffee, but simply can't because they don't have a way to get there?

In 2013, while I was working at 3M, I attended a series of public workshops held by the California Department of Motor Vehicles, who were tasked with rule-making to support the safe testing of Automated Vehicles on California roads. During one of those workshops, after all the Silicon Valley tech companies had finished their comments, two women came forward from the back of the room. These two women had arrived late. One woman was blind and one woman arrived in a wheelchair.

When they came to the microphone, they apologized that they were late and proceeded to explain the arduous process they had to go through just to get to the workshop. They explained how they had to book their ride days in advance - not hours or minutes but *days*. The arrival time was a 3

hour window, and after they had navigated themselves to the challenging meeting point, they had to send back the first ride because it wasn't wheelchair accessible and wait again. To top it all off, they described the outrageous costs for them to endure this process. But they did it that day to come and plead with the DMV to please help get this technology out on the roads for *them*, so their lives could be changed, so they could have a freedom they had only been able to dream about.

In 2019, I met an amazing woman, and fellow Governor's Council member, Myrna Peterson. Myrna is a 75 year old retired educator who lives in rural Grand Rapids. Almost 30 years ago, she was a marathon runner and busy mother of 4, who left a meeting with a friend and while driving home avoided a collision, rolled her truck and became quadriplegic in an instant, paralyzed from her shoulders down. Myrna now advocates on behalf of people with disabilities. She can explain to you in painful detail the costs of a wheelchair accessible ride. I will summarize to say it is over \$91 for the ride before even going anywhere. For many people in a rural community like Grand Rapids, that single ride is their entire transportation budget for a month.

Myrna has been a huge champion for the goMARTI project in Grand Rapids which has provided over 1100 wheelchair rides and continues to grow ridership every month. This success is possible because we placed a requirement on the technology partner to design and provide accessible shuttles. The success is possible because we keep accessibility at the forefront of all that we do. Because we research the accessibility of the on and off points to the shuttles. Because we require a local call center for those who are unable to book using an app on their phone. We are proud to say that our goMARTI efforts here in Minnesota are leading the CAV industry towards better accessibility.

As Tara noted, other states are creating or have already created policy frameworks which help lay out a clear path for the technology companies to research, test, and deploy their technologies on their roads. Unfortunately these deployments still leave out wheelchair riders and are primarily focused on metro areas.

Approximately 25% of Minnesota's population lives in our rural and tribal communities who do not have regular access to transportation options. The State is already not fulfilling a transportation obligation to our rural and tribal community members. About 12% of our State's population has a disability. The current approach to serving these populations is discriminatory due to high costs and limited options available to get around their communities.

While we as a State continue to determine what our path forward looks like for Automated Vehicles, it's important that we do not leave out these rider groups. Inclusive planning with our disabled, elderly, rural, and tribal community members is necessary to make sure that we are designing that policy with a purpose. If we do so, the CAV industry will benefit, and all of our community members will as well.

Thank you for your time.