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Look! No hands

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by Stephen Shotton

In transport, the term “first and last mile” is used to describe the usually short, terminal component of human travel such as between a person's home and a train station or between a bus stop and a workplace. Autonomous (driverless) vehicles are rapidly gaining interest world-wide in providing solutions for first and last mile transport of people and freight.

South Australia has taken a proactive role in enabling opportunities for development of innovative mobility solutions including among other initiatives, being the first state to enact legislation to conduct autonomous vehicle trials.

On the back of our Electric Highway project establishing a network of electric vehicle charging stations across the region, RDA took an opportunity to host a regional trial for the extension of the DPTI Future Mobility program being run at the Tonsley Precinct in Adelaide. The goal of the project was to determine whether an autonomous vehicle for first/last mile travel can improve retirement living.

The trial was run earlier this year at the Lendlease-owned Elliot Gardens in Port Elliot, a village of some 323 residents and extensive village assets including community centre, gardens, sporting and recreation facilities. The autonomous vehicle was a

British-made Aurrigo pod with four seats. For the trial the pod was speed limited to 10km/hr and run on predetermined routes within the village. Residents were able to hail the pod or book a trip via SMS,

phone or through the village office.

The aims of the trial were to give RDA, Aurrigo, DPTI and Lendlease a chance to assess the suitability of autonomous vehicles in a retirement living setting and to introduce and provide experience of autonomous travel to the wider regional community.

The Global Centre for Modern Ageing (GCMA) undertook research to analyse residents' attitudes towards autonomous vehicles, their use in a retirement village setting, understand user-experiences and to explore ideas for improvement of future autonomous vehicles.

Attitudes towards autonomous vehicles were found to be mainly positive and residents felt that the pod was safe and trustworthy which is a good start. When it came to

usefulness, residents felt the pod was useful in poor weather and for those who were older, less mobile or lived further away.

The trial showed that the real potential and greatest uptake of autonomous vehicles in a retirement village setting, will come when legislation and technology allow these vehicles on public roads. That will give residents a real option to travel outside of the village to shops, doctors, bowls clubs, connect with public transport and as many claimed, provide a solution for getting to and from their local watering-hole.

To get all the information on this trial go to the project page on our website – www.rdahc.com.au/projects



A Port Elliot retirement village has been involved with a trial of a self-driving 'pod'