Background

Talk of the advent of self-driving vehicles has permeated the news for several years now, however, these cars are not yet available to the general public. As a result, consumer acceptance of automated vehicles seems to be stuck in neutral. This survey seeks to understand how consumers currently feel about self-driving vehicles and related issues. A deeper knowledge of consumer sentiment can help identify the next steps the industry and other stakeholders need to take to help move consumers towards greater acceptance.

Key Findings

- Only one in ten (12%) drivers say they would trust a vehicle to drive itself while they are in it and 28% are unsure how they feel.

- Six in ten (57%) Americans would like to see more information in news stories or other public sources about who will be legally responsible for crashes with self-driving cars. This is followed by laws to make sure self-driving cars are safe (51%), how vulnerable self-driving cars will be to being hacked (49%) and easy-to-understand information about how self-driving cars will work (44%).

- Seven in ten (72%) Americans would feel safer riding in a self-driving car if they had the ability to take over control if something goes wrong. A similar proportion (69%) would feel safer if there was a human backup driver. Half (47%) would feel safer knowing the self-driving car has passed rigorous testing and inspections. Four in ten (42%) would feel safer after seeing or experiencing a demonstration prior to getting into a self-driving car.

To understand consumer attitudes toward self-driving vehicles, AAA pursued the following lines of inquiry:

1. Do U.S. drivers fear riding in a self-driving vehicle?
2. What kind of information would Americans like to see more of when it comes to self-driving vehicles?
3. What would make Americans feel safer about riding in self-driving vehicles?

Methodology

Due to a change in methodology in 2020, this year’s survey results are not directly comparable to results from prior years. This survey was conducted January 17 - 19, 2020, using a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population overall. The panel provides sample coverage of approximately 97% of the U.S. household population. Most surveys were completed online; consumers without internet access were surveyed over the phone. A total of 1,301 interviews were completed among U.S. adults, 18 years of age or older. The margin of error for the study overall is 4% at the 95% confidence level. Smaller subgroups have larger error margins.