

Preface

The autonomous vehicle (AV) was a challenging subject about which to write a book. It required dense use of the contingent voice (could, would, etc.) as it is an emergent technology – a moving target! Anticipating its sustainability prospects required thorough and timely judgments of new data and analysis on a daily basis. Meeting this challenge was made possible by the talented and efficient bibliographic assistance of Stan Jacobsen, a veteran editor with Nolo Press in Berkeley (and a good neighbor). His digital mining of hundreds of freshly published documents allowed me time to concentrate on writing. The work also was supported in kind through my on-going institutional affiliations: Emeritus Professor, Sociology Department, Montclair State University, Montclair, New Jersey; Visiting Professor, Centre for Environment and Sustainability, University of Surrey, Guildford; and Research Associate, Sociology Department, University of California, Santa Cruz.

The AV is a technology and a business with a laundry list of under-studied environmental and social implications bearing upon an array of weighty realms – climate change, public health, and urban transportation. I crafted its sustainability profile from the multidisciplinary perspective of an urban environmental sociologist. The prime venue for AV development and deployment is the US, and one hotspot is the San Francisco Bay Area (and its Silicon Valley), my home. I also have lived and worked in the UK, and the experience added appreciably to my grasp of the subject. In addition to the US and the UK, I judged seven countries as being most active in AV endeavors – China, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Sweden. These nations comprise a group I designated as the AV9 and followed through the book. Several others were referenced in a variety of contexts – Australia, Canada, and the Netherlands – while another dozen or so were occasional sources of material.

It is my hope that readers find something here that pricks their interest and satisfies their concern and curiosity about uncertain changes in daily life that may follow on the heels of an autonomous vehicle deployment, changes of considerable consequence for the sustainability of environments, societies, and cities.