CENTER TESTS SAFETY OF SELF-DRIVE VEHICLES

FROM A1

To develop self-driving vehicles, the industry must prove it is safe and persuade people to use the technology.

The two-hectare site has a track with sharp turns, traffic lights, and a bus stop to simulate real driving conditions. Shipping containers are stacked up to see how high rises could potentially block satellite signals to self-driving machines.

The Certa center, run by Nanyang Technological University (NTU), has a rain-making machine that simulates the frequent tropical downpours in the city-state of 5.7 million people.

Turns, pedestrians

All companies must put their autos through the center's testing and certification programs before they can hit public roads.

The sweeper is being tested for safety, along with cars and buses.

Singapore wants to lure autonomous tech companies looking to trial their vehicles in Asia, where many other major cities are traffic-clogged.

The first trials of an autonomous car on public roads took place in 2015.

In 2016, US software firm nuTonomy launched driverless taxi trials in public in Singapore, the first company in the world to do so.

Authorities plan to use self-driving vehicles in public transport for shuttling people to and from their homes or workplaces.

Bumpy path to success

There are still many roadblocks ahead.

Safety remains a major concern for the industry worldwide—in 2018, a self-driving Uber car was involved in a crash that killed a woman in Arizona.

All trials in Singapore still require a safety driver and most vehicles are not yet ready to cope with the regular downpours.

And the tiny country remains behind other markets like the United States where self-driving ride services are in various stages of deployment.

The key challenge may be persuading people to hop aboard self-driving vehicles.

"It's a journey that may take 10 to 20 years, but I think it's inevitable," said an NTU professor involved in the government program. —APP