Autonomous Vehicle Regulation Changes in California

Background: The California Dept. of Motor Vehicles (DMV) recently announced that they are going to be holding workshops to discuss changes concerning autonomous vehicles (AVs) without human operators that are over 10,000 lbs. Workshops of this nature are usually done prior to beginning the process of modifying government regulations without an act from the state legislature. Here's what lawmakers, professional drivers, and the public writ large need to know about AVs in California.

The DMV Shouldn't Consider Changing AV Rules.

- Regulating technology with an impact as profound and far-reaching as AVs through the DMV is outrageous. The possibility of changing rules around this topic through a state agency like the DMV shouldn't even be entertained.
- The allowance of these vehicles could lead to millions of workers being displaced and a dramatic spike in roadside deaths if done improperly, without those responsible for such a calamity having to answer for their actions at the ballot box.
- This isn't just an issue of roads and vehicles. Worker advocates – along with state agencies that oversees labor, employment, or economic policy – need to play an equally important role in any policy change regarding autonomous vehicles.
- Government officials and other stakeholders need more time to consider how this technology would impact both workers and the California economy. Therefore, regulations concerning AVs should be crafted by the California State Legislature through regular order.

Autonomous Vehicles Have Already Proven to Be Unsafe.

- AV companies and their technology continue to show that they're not ready to share the road with our communities and families.
- Small AVs are not ready to be operated without a properly trained professional driver behind the wheel, let alone a fully autonomous truck weighing over 10,000 lbs.

- According to automakers and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, over the course of 2022 there were more than 400 crashes in less than 11 months that involved AVs.[i] Over the course of a four-month period, eleven people were killed in AV-related accidents.[ii]
- Many of these incidents have taken place in San Francisco, where AV tech is regularly being tested or implemented.
- In April 2022, an autonomous vehicle in San Francisco was pulled over for not having its headlights on at night. After stopping for police, the vehicle bolted through an intersection without turning its lights on, risking an accident.[iii]
- Two months later in the same city, a self-driving vehicle turned left in an intersection, causing a crash that injured passengers in both vehicles.[iv]
- In December, an AV reportedly triggered an eight car crash – once again in San Francisco.[v]
- Scaling AVs without human operators as the technology exists currently would likely lead to a monumental increase in traffic fatalities.

The Economic Impact Needs to Be Accounted For.
- New technology can make the jobs of the future safer and more secure, but millions of jobs are at stake with this proposed regulation in the present. A recent Oxford University study showed that 47 percent of American employment is threatened by automation, with AVs being one of the most significant factors in that prediction.[vi]
- Companies such as Amazon, Uber, and Google have yet to outline how they will ensure workers will keep their jobs as automation enters the industry. By eliminating jobs for those who work behind the wheel for a living, families and communities will suffer.
- Many drivers across California have good-paying union jobs and contracts that have been hard-fought over many years. These workers deserve to know how these autonomous trucks will impact their livelihood.
- The economic impact goes far beyond unions. Truck driving is the most common job in 29 states, including California.[vii]

- If automated vehicles lead to massive unemployment, there is the likelihood of continued strain on public assistance, mental and physical health, higher suicide rates, and social unrest.[viii]

Legislation That Requires a Human Operator for AVs Is the Answer.
- California drivers should not be lab rats for big corporations, testing their technology on our streets and highways.
- This is an important issue to not just economic stakeholders in California, but people throughout the country. In fact, a poll in Pennsylvania showed that almost 60 percent of voters would be more likely to support a political candidate that was in favor of a human operator requirement in AVs.[ix]
- California lawmakers are in the best position to account for the impact AVs will have on workers and communities because they or their offices are in contact with constituents every day.
- Allowing the legislative process to play out ensures exponentially greater transparency and public input throughout the development of AV regulation.
- Legislation addressing both public safety as well as workforce concerns is the requirement for a highly trained human safety operator to be present in autonomous vehicles.
- By having a human safety operator, the public is protected in a worst-case scenario, by having a highly trained operator who can regain control of the vehicle, safely assess the situation, and provide aid if necessary.

Teamsters Are Not Luddites. Teamsters Are Pro-Worker and Pro-Safety.
- The adoption of new technologies is nothing new to the Teamsters Union or anyone in the labor movement. The Teamsters began in 1903 with most members driving teams of horses.
- When society evolved to the motorized vehicle in the early 20th century, the Teamsters were there to organize workers operating this new technology.
- The Teamsters are not shying away from a discussion around new technology and will continue to be advocates to ensure that workers and public safety are top of mind for elected officials.

- The autonomous vehicle (AV) industry in California is pushing for overly broad and under-regulated legislation that allows them to operate with little to no oversight.
- The Teamsters have fought over the past several years to address safety, liability, and workforce issues as it relates to these vehicles.
- The Teamsters have pushed for increased transparency in safety/crash data, for evidence-based liability dollar amounts, a robust and public autonomous vehicle application process, phases of testing, appropriate penalties, and ideas to address workforce concerns.

[i] https://www.npr.org/2022/06/15/1105252793/nearly-400-car-crashes-in-11-months-involved-automated-tech-companies-tell-regul

[ii] https://www.cbsnews.com/news/self-driving-vehicles-crash-deaths-elon-musk-tesla-nhtsa-2022/

[iii] http://electrek.co/2022/04/gm-cruise-autonomous-taxi-pulled-over-by-police-in-san-francisco-without-humans-bolts-off-u-cruise-responds/

[iv] https://insideevs.com/news/596827/gm-cruise-self-driving-crash-injuries/

[v] https://www.cnn.com/2022/12/21/business/tesla-fsd-8-car-crash/index.html

[vi] https://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/downloads/academic/The_Future_of_Employment.pdf

[vii] https://www.fleetowner.com/news/article/21689896/truck-driver-is-the-most-common-job-in-29-states

[viii] https://abcnews.go.com/Health/potential-recession-harm-mental-health-experts/story?id=85593097

[ix] https://landline.media/pennsylvanians-remain-skeptical-of-autonomous-vehicles/