

Autonomous Buses: Employment and Public Safety Impacts

Across the U.S., cities, transit agencies, universities and others are experimenting with autonomous shuttle services. While the technology behind these pilot projects may sound exciting, there are serious concerns about autonomous vehicles, especially regarding their introduction into public transit systems. Without thoughtful, pro-worker policies in place, these vehicles would have a **significant, negative impact on employment and public safety**. The **Transport Workers Union of America** (TWU) is working to ensure that these concerns are addressed before any of these vehicles hit the road.

Job Loss Related to Autonomous Buses

Autonomous buses will lead to the **displacement of bus drivers**, resulting in the loss of tens of thousands of middle class jobs that provide good benefits.

- Nationally, over 174,000 workers are employed as transit and intercity bus drivers. The median wage for these bus operators in 2018 was \$20.23, almost 9% higher than the median wage of \$18.58 for all occupations combined.ⁱ
- In Ohio, 5,200 transit and intercity bus operators earn a median wage of \$18.45, compared to \$17.96 for all occupations combined in the state.ⁱⁱ In Columbus, transit bus operators represented by the TWU earn a top wage of \$29.71.
- African Americans will be disproportionately impacted by autonomous-bus-related job loss because they are over-represented in the bus driver occupation. African Americans make up 12.3% of the U.S. work force, but account for 29.4% of those employed as bus drivers.ⁱⁱⁱ Job loss will affect not only displaced workers, but also their families and local communities.
- While some argue that displaced workers will move into newly created jobs in other sectors,^{iv} there is no guarantee the new jobs will be in the same geographic area or that workers will have access to the education and training required by those positions.

Public Safety Concerns

Because bus operators do far more than drive their vehicles, removing them from buses will negatively impact the public safety. Without an operator on board:

- **Seniors, persons with disabilities** and others with **special needs** will have no one to help them board and exit the bus safely, secure their wheelchairs, alert them to their stop, or provide route or transfer information.
- **Children** and other vulnerable passengers will have no protection from **bullying and harassment**.
- **Criminal activity** will go unchecked and **health emergencies** unreported.
- Buses will be vulnerable to **hacking** and **hijacking**, with no one onboard trained to respond.
- **Other motorists, cyclists and pedestrians, as well as property**, will be at risk because driverless vehicle technologies are not foolproof; accidents have occurred that have resulted in property damage, injuries and even death, and they will continue to occur.

Protecting Good Jobs and Enhancing Public Safety in the Age of Automation

The TWU is not opposed to technology. However, new technology must be implemented in a way that **protects both middle-class jobs** and the **public safety**.

- Autonomous vehicles should always have qualified **operators on board** capable of driving the vehicle when the automation fails. The driver would also continue to assist passengers with boarding and directions, protect against criminal behavior and report health emergencies; and
- Transit agencies and governments must establish job training/job creation plans to mitigate the unemployment autonomous vehicle technology will cause. These plans should be created with the full buy in of unions representing effected workers, including the TWU.

ⁱ Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2018 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates; https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm#00-0000

ⁱⁱ Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2018 State Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates, Ohio; https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_oh.htm#53-0000

ⁱⁱⁱ Bureau of Labor Statistics, Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, Household Data Annual Averages 11. Employed Persons by Detailed Occupation, Sex, Race, and Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity; <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat11.htm>

^{iv} Stick Shift, Autonomous Vehicles, Driving Jobs, and the Future of Work, Center for Global Policy Solutions, p. 32; <http://globalpolicysolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Stick-Shift-Autonomous-Vehicles.pdf>
