



Protecting the Public in a Developing Autonomous Vehicle Landscape

Autonomous vehicles (AVs) are experimenting on roads throughout the United States with little regulation or accountability. The public needs transparency and safety when it comes to autonomous vehicles, and public transit and student transportation, especially, need to be held to a higher standard. Governments should not force students and people without cars to ride in untested and unsafe AVs. State governments also have a duty to ensure that public resources are used wisely and must step in to ensure that AV operations are safe, accountable, and transparent.

The safety of autonomous vehicles has been radically overstated, and AVs are not prepared to deal with the dynamic emergency situations that ATU members handle

every day without incident. AV companies tout bought-and-paid-for studies to claim that AVs are safer than human drivers but conceal their “proprietary” safety and performance data.¹ They refuse to disclose how much their vehicles rely on human operators to function properly. In addition, AV company Waymo has admitted that some of their remote operators are located outside of the United States in countries like the Philippines.² Whether these remote operators are trained, licensed, and held accountable remains unknown. Waymo assured cities that its vehicles needed no network connectivity to operate, only for its AVs to shut down en masse and clog San Francisco’s streets amid a power outage in December 2025.³ When emergencies strike, overloading power facilities and networks, will the roads of American cities be clogged with unresponsive AVs?

Worse still, autonomous vehicles are unaccountable. Today, companies like Waymo, Zoox, and Tesla are pushing legislators for permission to operate more and bigger AVs while bitterly opposing common-sense regulations. While social media is full of evidence that AVs regularly violate traffic laws, block traffic, and impede emergency responders, most states lack the legal infrastructure to issue so much as a ticket to an AV.⁴ States should not permit AVs



1 David Zipper, “We still don’t know if robotaxis are safer than human drivers,” *Bloomberg*, Jan. 6, 2026, <http://bloomberg.com/news/features/2026-01-06/are-autonomous-vehicles-safer-than-human-drivers-we-don-t-know-yet>.

2 Andrew Orlowski, “Driverless cars promise a revolution. But can they handle the British weather?” *The Telegraph*, Dec. 28, 2025, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2025/12/28/driverless-cars-promise-revolution-handle-british-weather/>.

3 Rachel Swan and J.D. Morris, “Inside Daniel Lurie’s handling of Waymo crisis during S.F. power outages,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, Jan. 8, 2026, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/sf/article/daniel-lurie-waymo-blackouts-pge-21282099.php>; Sonia A. Rao, Christina Morales, and Alessandro Marazzi Sassoon, “Waymo Suspended Service in San Francisco After Its Cars Stalled During Power Outage,” *New York Times*, Dec. 21, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/12/21/us/waymo-suspended-service-in-san-francisco-after-problems-during-power-outage.html>.

4 Kelly Wiley, “School district says Waymo continues to illegally pass its buses after recall,” *Fox Austin*, Jan. 15, 2026, <https://myfox8.com/news/school-district-says-waymo-continues-to-illegally-pass-its-buses-after-recall/>; Michael Levenson and Laurel Rosenhall, “When a Driverless Car Makes an Illegal U-Turn, Who Gets the Ticket?” *New York Times*, Oct. 1, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/01/us/waymo-tickets-san-bruno.html>.

to operate without requiring unredacted safety disclosures and imposing accountability on AVs that violate traffic laws and impede emergency responders.

Autonomous vehicles have already arrived in the public transit industry. AV companies are lobbying local and state governments to shift their limited public funding away from efficient mass transit modes to small autonomous shuttles. The Jacksonville Transportation Authority, for example, spends about \$370 per rider on its AV shuttle, which transports so few people that the Authority used paid staff hours to boost ridership.⁵ These expensive experiments draw investment away from proven and effective transit modes.

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“Waymo robotaxi hits child near elementary school, prompting NHTSA Investigation”

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States, localities, and transit agencies must recognize that in-vehicle transit workers are essential to safety and invest accordingly. They are the eyes and ears of the community, supporting people in emergency situations, helping passengers find their way, assisting the elderly and people with disabilities, and monitoring children on their way to and from school. The most effective way to ensure that our public transit systems are safe and welcoming is to staff them with workers who provide customer service and keep riders coming back.

ATU recommends prohibiting the use of autonomous vehicles used for public transit and school bus transportation purposes to protect passengers like students, people with disabilities, the elderly, and people who can't afford a car. Autonomous commercial motor vehicles that carry passengers and goods should also be required to have a properly licensed driver present in the vehicle. States, localities, and transit agencies should invest in existing transit modes that actually move people, rather than wasting funds on experiments that cash-rich AV companies like Waymo can very well pay for themselves.

ATU members are licensed, extensively trained, receive regular medical evaluations, and are subject to regular drug and alcohol testing to ensure safety. If jurisdictions

launch pilot AV projects in public transit or student transportation, they should ensure that workers with extensive experience in the industry are at the table and are party to discussions about the use of autonomous technology at their jobs. State governments should be investing in workers and the essential services they provide, not spending to help private companies work out the kinks in their newest products.

ATU SUPPORTS:

1. Prohibiting the use of autonomous vehicles in public transit and school transportation;
2. Requiring a licensed driver who can manually control the vehicle to be physically present in all commercial motor vehicles that carry passengers and goods;
3. Enacting a Vehicle Miles and Vehicle Hours Traveled fee for autonomous vehicles deployed for a commercial purpose and dedicating the funds to public transportation.
4. Requiring autonomous vehicle test drivers and remote operators to comply with licensing, hours of service, and drug and alcohol testing laws, and that they be W-2 employees physically located in the state where AV operations are occurring;
5. Deeming the use of autonomous vehicles a mandatory subject of bargaining and requiring that transit agencies provide unions advance notice of their intent to use autonomous vehicles;
6. Requiring AV manufacturers to make full, unredacted disclosures of AV safety and performance data and publicize their use of remote operators, as well as the qualifications and oversight applied to remote operators;
7. Ensuring accountability for autonomous vehicle manufacturers when their vehicles break the law or cause harm; and
8. Funding worker training programs to ensure that current transit workers can operate, maintain, and dispatch autonomous vehicles, as well as reskilling programs that mitigate any job loss due to autonomous vehicle and related technologies, and ensuring the fair transition of displaced workers.

⁵ David Bauerlein, “Duval DOGE members grill JTA on low ridership for autonomous shuttles,” *Jacksonville Florida Times-Union*, Nov. 5 2025, <https://www.jacksonville.com/story/news/local/2025/11/04/new-jta-autonomous-shuttles-face-questions-by-duval-doge/87090347007/>.