

Ed Godfrey - Comments

I am a veteran truck driver of over 20 years. This letter is in regards to autonomous trucks. First off, how will this technology compare to the experienced driver that can (using years of experience) actively predict future events in traffic such as a vehicle with a tire that is about to blow out, debris that is going to fall from a vehicle, or a failing vehicle that is an clear threat to the roadway?

I have had numerous such incidents in the 20+ years I have operated an eighteen wheeler. During such incidents, it was paramount that action be taken the instant the threat was made clear. How are automated systems going to perform this action? How can a computer ever be able to predict the behavior of the surrounding traffic?

What will automated technology do better than a trained, experienced, proven driver on the long stretches of highway that they are planning to use their technology on? There are lives at stake and to date, the only proven method for having a safe highway is to have well paid professional drivers who pay attention at all times and stay alert to potential hazards.

Radar, cameras, GPS, and environmental mapping cannot save lives as opposed to an experienced operator. I'm interested to understand why this technology isn't being tested on nonpublic roadways in all of the various scenarios that arise in the real world. There are dangerous loads being hauled on the highway on any given day. In the event of a serious incident, automated trucking systems have no proven results that could prevent accidents or death in a potential chain reaction event where the automated truck is unable to react to a clear event that is unfolding in front of it.

While I am excited about this technology, I can't see where they are anywhere near a point where operating their equipment on a public roadway around families and fellow drivers of all types is possible. While the videos of the automated trucks are interesting and exciting, if something that I have already described above had occurred, the driver who was in the sleeper berth while the autonomous truck is in control, could not have reacted in time as an active person sitting behind the wheel could have.

In over 2 million miles of operating a semi-truck on just about every one of the nation's highways, I can say that there is very little training or experience needed to just keep the truck in between the lines and under the speed limit. The training and experience comes in handy when unforeseen circumstances become hazards to a safe environment. The technology cannot and will not be able to spot these active hazards in the split second time that is required to act. For this reason, I respectfully request that the autonomous truck community spend time testing this technology out of the public's eye until real data is collected on all of the various circumstances that can occur when people's lives are at stake.