

Joseph Van Horn - Comments

It is my professional opinion that the concept of fully autonomous trucks is currently neither safe nor feasible. Who will open and close trailer doors? Who will back the truck to the dock? Who will fuel the truck? Who will couple and uncouple trailers, assuming that route is still desired by the customer? In the winter, who will throw and pull chains? In the event of an emergency, what's to ensure the computer will perform the correct response, if it responds at all (think back to that one self-driving Uber that hit and killed a person)? When presented with a scenario where a collision is unavoidable due to a mechanical failure (remember, there's no driver on board the fully automated truck to perform a pretrip inspection, which means nobody to detect mechanical defects before they become failures), how can we be sure the computer will choose the option that is NOT the school bus full of children? How will the computer handle the driver of the 4-wheeler that cuts it off and brake checks it to attempt insurance fraud, or in an attempt to commit suicide? How will the computer, when complying with a traffic control device (assuming it's able to comply, that is), ensure that no part of the truck or trailer will come to a stop over any sets of railroad tracks that might be present? These are but a fraction of the issues I've seen raised or that I've thought of myself regarding the machines that are being designed to replace myself and the tens of thousands of others who also do what I do. There are too many variables to fully automate these trucks, not without also fully automating trains, buses and automobiles at EXACTLY THE SAME TIME. We don't even allow aircraft to be fully automated, and they typically don't have conflict to deal with. They still require a pilot be in the cockpit ready to take control away from the flight director at all times. So why are we discussing the allowance of a fully automated truck, in a more heavily conflicted operating space, and without any kind of direct override option/requirement? It's a half-baked idea at this point that's likely to get people killed while more than tripling the unemployment rate. And even if we did have a direct override option/requirement, driver pay would need to change rapidly, so the Bureau of Labor would have THEIR work cut out for them. TL;DR, I don't believe this or any other agency nor corporation has actually thought this through, so even if I weren't a professional driver, I'd still be more than a little uncomfortable with the prospect of nobody being on board the truck to keep it from killing me