

Testimony of Ken Hall
General Secretary Treasurer of the
International Brotherhood of Teamsters
to the
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
September 13, 2017



International Brotherhood of Teamsters
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Testimony of Ken Hall – General Secretary Treasurer of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters

Chairman Thune, Ranking Member Nelson, Senator Peters, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on an issue that is of vital importance to American workers.

My name is Ken Hall. I am the General Secretary Treasurer of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. The Teamsters Union is the nation's largest transportation union, representing workers in almost every transportation industry. Teamster members could be delivering anything from bakery goods to concrete, palletized material to your latest online package - or getting you to work on time and safely transporting your kids to school.

While nearly 600,000 of our 1.4 million members turn a key in a truck to start their workday, the issues we will be discussing today don't just impact those who drive vehicles for a living. A future that includes partial and fully autonomous vehicles could also change the nature of work for those in nearly every part of the transportation industry in our country.

Planning for the future and incorporating new technologies into our members' daily lives is not new to me or to my Union. In addition to my duties as

General Secretary Treasurer, for over twenty years I also served as director of the union's package division. In this position I ran the Teamsters daily interactions with UPS, under the single largest collective bargaining agreement in North America.

The issues facing the 250,000 Teamsters who work for UPS are inextricably tied to the incorporation of new technology. The logistics industry as a whole has changed extraordinarily over time and Teamsters have been in the thick of it. We have strived to balance the incorporation of countless pieces of new technology into the workplace while ensuring that workers are guaranteed a right to avoid harassment and to always feel safe on the job. My career has shown me that new technologies can exist in an environment where workers are still taken care of. But it takes strong and aggressive action from those workers to make sure that happens.

Self-driving vehicles have the potential to change the transportation industry as we know it. That can be for the better or for the worse depending on the actions that this committee, workers, and others take in guiding their implementation onto our roads. It is incumbent upon the members of this committee to help ensure that workers are not left behind in this process. It is

essential that American workers are not treated as guinea pigs for unproven technologies that could put their lives at risk.

The issues facing autonomous commercial trucks are fundamentally different, and potentially more calamitous than those facing passenger cars, and warrant their own careful consideration. The consequences for getting this wrong could be deadly both for workers and other drivers on the roads. The public discussion in Congress on autonomous vehicles has tended to focus on the impact of small personal cars on our daily lives - increasing mobility for the disabled, and alleviating congestion in our cities. These are all important topics. But taking a cookie cutter approach in dealing with those issues and applying it to heavy vehicles is reckless.

For instance, I have yet to hear a serious discussion about how we will make sure an 80,000 pound automated truck will be able to maneuver around a warehouse or drop yard and not injure the countless workers also occupying that same space. Or how we would make sure that the rules governing a driver's training requirements would be updated the moment one of these new vehicles is put on the road. And we haven't gotten to the largest issue of them all, the potential impact on the livelihoods and wages of millions of your constituents.

These issues should be considered carefully and deliberately at the outset of this discussion, not after the fact.

For all of the discussion here about the potential benefits that may accompany this technology, I urge you to consider these possibilities with a healthy dose of realism. When you hear manufacturers tell you that a list of strong safety metrics will translate into effortless deployment on the roads, I urge you to recall some of the other issues that this committee has so furiously worked on this year.

This committee has spearheaded investigations into VW knowingly cheating its customers out of emission benefits. The airbag manufacturer Takata knowingly sold defective airbags that have claimed the lives of American citizens. Market forces did not convince these companies not to cheat and push the envelope past what was safe. And that same mentality is a constant factor in the trucking space where margins are consistently tight and competition is fierce. The fear of many transportation workers is that absent strong action and guidance from this committee and others, a new generation of autonomous vehicles will provide limitless opportunity for this same pattern of reckless behavior.

There are so many impacts to consider. Unchecked, this new technology could open our citizens up to having their privacy breached and personal data sold. Issues such as worker harassment and tracking would be intertwined with existing collective bargaining agreements and workplace policies. A truck driver will have to think about having his rig hacked and used as the next weapon in a Nice or Barcelona-style attack, and millions of Americans could have their paychecks decreased because half of their job has now been automated away and their employer thinks that it can get away with no longer paying them the full wage they once did.

I applaud you for having this hearing with the Teamsters' voice at the table. I look forward to working with the Committee to ensure that the priorities and concerns of working families remain at the center of this debate. In all aspects of automation, but especially when we are considering commercial motor vehicles, it is more important to get it done correctly rather than just done quickly.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.