

An Open Letter on Robotaxis and Autonomous Vehicles in Washington

We are highly opposed to the City of Seattle, the State of Washington, or any local jurisdiction permitting robotaxis to travel on our public roads without human safety operators.

While tech giants are once again promising a utopian vision for the future, the vast negative impacts of adding robotaxis to our current transportation infrastructure cannot be overlooked. Robotaxis are unsafe, unproven, discriminatory, job-killing, unpopular, and unnecessary. We urge regulators to deny permitting to robotaxis, appropriately regulate and require human safety operators in vehicles, and leave our region off the list of places allowing a needless and dangerous corporate experiment to play out on public streets.

Here are a few of the most pressing reasons why:

Safety

There are widely reported safety concerns and troubling patterns of dangerous events in the places that have allowed robotaxis on their streets.

In recent Waymo test cities, for example, robotaxis are: trapping passengers in vehiclesⁱ ⁱⁱ, driving into oncoming traffic lanesⁱⁱⁱ ^{iv}, driving around in circles^v ^{vi}, repeatedly blocking emergency vehicles^{vii} ^{viii} ^{ix}, not stopping for pedestrians in marked crosswalks^x ^{xi}, beeping and honking all night^{xii} ^{xiii}, and driving into flooded roadways^{xiv} ^{xv} ^{xvi}. Waymo recalled over 1,200 vehicles earlier this year due to software that resulted in collisions with road barriers.^{xvii} Tesla recalled over 360,000 vehicles with its “full self-driving” software for safety issues after a 2023 NHTSA investigation.^{xviii} Experimental robotaxi operators have been involved in frightening incidents including collisions and near-misses with emergency vehicles^{xix} ^{xx}, leaving the scene of an accident without stopping^{xxi}, and running over and dragging a pedestrian nearly 20 feet and then filing a false report about the incident with the NHTSA^{xxii}.

The concept of maintaining a human presence for safety in transportation as technology develops is not new or unusual. The earliest autopilots in aviation were introduced more than a century ago, and the first fully automated transatlantic flight was in 1947^{xxiii}. But to this day, two human pilots are required to be present on commercial aircraft to handle the inevitable emergencies, unpredictable events, technical failures, and other issues that can arise.

Our drivers, passengers, pedestrians, cyclists, and the general public simply should not be put in the position of unwilling test subjects in a corporate robotaxi experiment.

Discrimination and equity

As seen in rollouts of other software intended to identify humans^{xxiv}, the technology in autonomous vehicles exhibits concerning racial and other biases.

Research shows autonomous vehicle software intended to detect pedestrians is unable to detect people with darker skin as often as lighter-skinned people^{xxv xxvi}, a problem exacerbated by lighting conditions (e.g, night driving). The software is also less able to recognize children than adult pedestrians^{xxvii}.

The implications of discriminatory software operating moving vehicles on the public roadway are incredibly high stakes. As one researcher noted, “While the impact of unfair AI systems has already been well documented... the danger that self-driving cars can pose is acute. Before, minority individuals may have been denied vital services, now they might face severe injury.”^{xxviii}

Our region’s deep commitment to equity and eliminating racial bias surely must extend to issues as serious as whether robotaxis are more likely to harm pedestrians of color.

Congestion and emissions

Adding new fleets of cars to our notoriously clogged streets^{xxix xxx} would unnecessarily increase congestion and emissions.

The existing local for-hire transportation market, dominated by transportation network companies like Uber and Lyft, is already experiencing an oversupply of rideshare vehicles. While TNC services were also originally pitched as congestion relief, they have had the opposite effect. With no regulatory guardrails to balance TNC vehicle supply to rider demand or limit “deadheading” miles (miles traveled without a passenger)^{xxxi}, TNCs are already contributing to *increased* congestion^{xxxii xxxiii}. There is no reason to believe that adding a new class of taxi to the current infrastructure of taxi, limo, and rideshare options will do anything different.^{xxxiv xxxv xxxvi}

More individual cars on the road, more vehicle miles traveled, and worsening congestion are the opposite of our region’s goals for transportation. Whether robotaxis themselves are electric does not negate the harm robotaxis are projected to cause to our climate from increased congestion and vehicle miles traveled.^{xxxvii xxxviii}

Existing solutions like improving transit, regulating a balanced for-hire transportation market, and improving road safety and efficiency are both more helpful and less problematic than experimental robotaxis.

Worker rights and local jobs

Policymakers should not threaten local union jobs – jobs that provide economic security to predominantly immigrant communities – for the benefit of out-of-state corporations.

The last time big tech “disrupters” entered our for-hire transportation market, it was companies like Uber and Lyft aiming to take over our local taxi business. Companies entered the market with initially low prices for consumers and high pay for drivers, evaded and fought against regulation as long as possible^{xxix}, and presented a gleaming vision of a greener carpool-based transportation option^{xl}. Once entrenched in the market, they offered algorithmic price-gouging to consumers^{xli xlii xliii}, poverty wages to drivers^{xliv}, and achieved no big environmental wins^{xlv}.

This kind of corporate bait and switch is nothing new, and rideshare drivers have now spent more than a decade organizing and advocating for better wages and working conditions. In 2025, after local and statewide regulation that involved workers having a real seat at the legislative table with tech companies, conditions have meaningfully improved: Washington rideshare drivers earn a minimum wage; have access to benefits like sick leave, workers compensation, unemployment, and paid family/medical leave; have legal standards for termination and can receive free legal support; experience legal protection from retaliation and discrimination; and are supported by a sustainably funded, culturally competent Driver Resource Center.

This workforce is majority immigrant, majority people of color, and still relatively low-wage-earning. The for-hire transportation workforce hails from all over the world, and most trips are completed by full-time workers. These workers are family breadwinners, local taxpayers, and reliant on these jobs to survive. Early analysis shows that rideshare driver pay is already being driven down in cities with robotaxis.^{xlvi}

Taxi and for-hire drivers are also local workers at risk of serious economic harm and professional impacts, and they offer services not replaceable by robotaxis. Taxis are an integral part of local paratransit, senior transit, and Medicaid transportation programs, while wheelchair accessible taxicab operators undergo special training and licensing to serve wheelchair users. Rides can be hailed from the street without a smartphone app. Drivers accept cash fares. There are passengers who need access to taxi and for-hire rides with human operators who can provide specialized assistance, yet competition from robotaxis would significantly threaten the viability of the taxi and for-hire market.

Inviting out-of-state robotaxi corporations to come in and replace local workers, with no planning or coordination for how that will impact local jobs, is a slap in the face to the 30,000+ for-hire drivers working in Washington today.

Lack of Public Support

There is wide skepticism of robotaxis and autonomous vehicles by the public.

While surveys show consumers broadly are afraid, distrustful, and uninterested in robotaxis^{xlvi}^{xlviii}, companies motivated by their own profit are continually imagining a future market for these services. Financial analysts believe that market may be a wild overestimate that doesn't make financial sense^{xlix}.

Especially given the myriad other concerns, there is simply no reason to flood already busy streets with a new class of vehicles people are not interested in using, just because large companies are demanding access to our public roads and personal transportation market.

We have the opportunity and the right to say no. We urge that you do so.

ⁱ [Riders say Waymo car trapped them inside during Austin trip](#)

ⁱⁱ [Waymo passenger nearly misses his flight after car drives in circles | CNN Business](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [Waymo robotaxi pulled over by Phoenix police after driving into the wrong lane | TechCrunch](#)

^{iv} [Waymo Robotaxi Drives Into Oncoming Lane To Avoid Unicyclists](#)

^v [A Waymo robotaxi got stuck in a roundabout loop | TechCrunch](#)

^{vi} [Empty Waymo Robotaxi Loops Roundabout 37 Times As If It Was Stuck In Logic Loop](#)

^{vii} [Waymo, Cruise vehicles have impeded emergency vehicle response 66 times this year: SFFD](#)

^{viii} [Explore: 55 reports of robotaxis interfering with S.F. firefighters](#)

^{ix} [Robotaxis tangle with San Francisco firetrucks. Chief is fed up - Los Angeles Times](#)

^x [Waymo robotaxis can make walking across the street a game of chicken - The Washington Post](#)

^{xi} [Crossing guards say driverless cars nearly hit them in crosswalks](#)

^{xii} [Residents say Waymo robotaxis are driving them mad | CNN](#)

^{xiii} [Waymo Innovates New Ways To Annoy Even Non-Drivers: Constant Nighttime Honking](#)

^{xiv} [Waymo car drives into flooded road with a passenger onboard : r/SelfDrivingCars](#)

^{xv} [Waymo drives through sinkhole in San Francisco during storm](#)

^{xvi} [Waymo's stalled in street flooding : r/waymo](#)

^{xvii} [RCLRPT-25E034-2471.PDF](#)

^{xviii} [Tesla Recall Hits Nearly 363,000 Cars With "Full Self-Driving" Software](#)

^{xix} [California Asks Cruise To Halve Driverless Car Fleet After Crash](#)

^{xx} [Driverless cars are operating on Texas roads. Here's what you should know. | The Texas Tribune](#)

^{xxi} [Driverless cars are operating on Texas roads. Here's what you should know. | The Texas Tribune](#)

^{xxii} [Cruise admits to filing false report after robotaxi dragged a San Francisco pedestrian – NBC Bay Area](#)

^{xxiii} [Robot-Piloted Plane Makes Safe Crossing of Atlantic; No Hand on Controls From Newfoundland to Oxfordshire-- Take-Off, Flight and Landing Are Fully Automatic PILOTLESS PLANE CROSSES ATLANTIC MAKES TRANSATLANTIC FLIGHT UNDER CONTROL OF 'MECHANICAL BRAIN' - The New York Times](#)

^{xxiv} [Many Facial-Recognition Systems Are Biased, Says U.S. Study - The New York Times](#)

^{xxv} [Predictive Inequity in Object Detection](#)

^{xxvi} [Driverless cars worse at detecting children and darker-skinned pedestrians say scientists | King's College London](#)

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- xxvii [Driverless cars worse at detecting children and darker-skinned pedestrians say scientists | King's College London](#)
- xxviii [Driverless cars worse at detecting children and darker-skinned pedestrians say scientists | King's College London](#)
- xxix [Why Seattle traffic got worse in 2024 - Axios Seattle](#)
- xxx [Seattle has 12th-worst commute, 5th-worst congestion in U.S.](#)
- xxxi [Study finds ride-sharing intensifies urban road congestion | MIT News | Massachusetts Institute of Technology](#)
- xxxi [Uber and Lyft are increasing car traffic in Seattle. How much? 94 million miles | The Seattle Times](#)
- xxxi [Hiltzik: Congestion, pollution and worse: The drawbacks of Uber and Lyft - Los Angeles Times](#)
- xxxiv [Robo-cars could further clog traffic, experts say](#)
- xxxv [The Paradox at the Heart of Elon Musk's Cybercab Vision | WIRED](#)
- xxxvi [A self-driving car traffic jam is coming for US cities | Vox](#)
- xxxvii [Electric robotaxi fleets could create more climate-damaging emissions — study](#)
- xxxviii [The unseen environmental costs of autonomous cars | Smart Cities Dive](#)
- xxxix [Right Before a Big City Council Vote, Uber Blocks Public Records Request About Seattle Drivers - The Stranger](#)
- xl [Uber Blog » Seattle, Your UBERx is Arriving NOW!](#)
- xli [New Report Shows Uber's Increasing Corporate Take Rate Driving Up Fare Prices in Seattle - Drivers Union](#)
- xlii [Uber faces backlash over alleged AI-driven fare increases | king5.com](#)
- xliii [Uber's Price-Gouging and What We Can Do About It - National Employment Law Project](#)
- xliv [New Report: Seattle drivers would benefit from a pay standard equivalent to the city's minimum wage – Institute for Research on Labor and Employment](#)
- xlvi [Uber, Lyft would need to cut emissions under WA state plan | Cascade PBS](#)
- xlvi [How Are Robotaxis Affecting Driver Pay in AV Cities? | Gridwise](#)
- xlvi [Do People Even Want Robotaxis? Polls Suggest Not — And Tesla Isn't Helping](#)
- xlvi [Robotaxis and autonomous cars are still scary to most Americans | Mashable](#)
- xlix [Don't believe the hype around robotaxis, HSBC analysts say - Safety21](#)