



On The Move

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Driverless Public Transit Vehicles Pose a Threat to Jobs and Public Safety

The push for driverless vehicles is gaining steam in Pennsylvania. The state legislature recently expanded the use of driverless vehicles on our highways and roads allowing commercial vehicles, including 18-wheel tractor trailers, to go driverless. As driverless technology develops, these vehicles could pose a genuine threat to the job security of Local 234 members and the safety of the riding public.

Given the stakes, we must fight for contractual restraints on the operation of public transit vehicles without an operator.

At the Navy Yard the first “self-driving” bus in the city carries passengers around the South Philadelphia office park. While the shuttle has an operator on-board, the plan is to transition to driverless operations and expand the route to carry riders to SEPTA’s Broad Street NRG Station (once known as Pattison Ave.).

The Navy Yard project involves PennDOT, Drexel University and the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission. PennDOT currently requires two operators in the Navy Yard autonomous vehicle. The person in the drivers’ seat stops the vehicle for passengers and assists with other tasks the driverless vehicle cannot perform. PennDOT plans to transition to one operator and maybe to none and therein lies the problem.

Driverless shuttle vehicles are also on the road in eleven states and the District of Columbia. Most have an operator aboard, but the supporters of driverless vehicles want to eliminate the operator and turn over our public transit system to robots. While robotic drivers may be capable of operating on city streets, although that is doubtful, they are certainly not capable of dealing with the things that happen on public transit vehicles. That’s why a human operator is indispensable.

Local 234 is not an enemy of new technology, so long as common sense applies

Car, rail and bus technology has evolved over the years----consider power steering, power brakes, automatic transmissions, and other vehicle innovations. These technologies have generally served to support the people driving cars and buses. Vehicles with sensors, speed controls and other forms of artificial intelligence capable of operating on city streets, can also support the people operating the vehicle, but if the plan is to *eliminate* the operator, we have a problem, as does the riding public.

Few people will get on a SEPTA vehicle if they are left without someone to bring order, security, and safety to the riding experience. Moreover, the safety of driverless vehicles is questionable. For example, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration recently identified serious safety concerns with Tesla’s autopilot function and as a result Tesla agreed to recall 2 million vehicles to try to fix the problem. Autopilot is supposed to *assist* with steering and acceleration in vehicles that still need a driver.

Keeping a trained, certified operator at the helm of a transit vehicle is a *necessity* for an agency committed to providing safe public *transit services* and Local 234 intends to fight for that belief in the state legislature and in contract negotiations with SEPTA.

15th Annual Take Care of Our Own Golf Outing

On June 3, 2024, Local 234 will hold its annual Golf Outing at the Northampton Valley Country Club. Local 234's golf outing has become one of the premier golfing events in the region, hosting friends and supporters of the union, as well as many local union members.

The golfing is on a five-star golf course and the food is outstanding, including breakfast, cocktails, Hors d'oeuvres, and a full dinner. The proceeds from the event go to support the Daryl Mack Scholarship Program that provides financial support to advance the education of our members and their families.

For TWU members, active and retired, admission to the event is \$85, if you register by May 3 and \$100 on the day of the event. Non-members are charged \$150 per person. The outing kicks off at 7:00 a.m., rain or shine, and breakfast is served.

Save the date, June 3, 2024. For more information you can call the Union Hall at 215-972-4140.

SEPTA fires an entire crew of track workers

In early 2023, SEPTA terminated twelve track general helpers working at the Erie Avenue Station on November 19, 2022, for rule violations made possible by the outrageous conduct of the SEPTA supervisor in charge of the crew. The supervisor recklessly disregarded the safety of the crew and became incapacitated on the job ("slurred speech"), so much so that he had to be carried out of the station by two employees. During SEPTA's investigation and the subsequent grievance hearings, track management failed to disclose, let alone consider, the supervisor's conduct in its decision to fire an entire crew of track employees.

In fact, track management determined that their guy was guilty of "gross negligence" for violating virtually every safety rule for working in the track area with train traffic, endangering the track crew, the train crews, and passengers---placing all in danger. As a result, the boss got fired. However, management failed to disclose the conclusions it reached about the boss's negligence, undermining the Union's ability to present relevant evidence in support of the track grievants at the formal hearings, a breach of the Grievants' right to due process.

Everybody involved, the crew, track managers---Birmingham, Metzger, and Stump---were unwilling to *expose* what caused the boss to become incapacitated while on duty, in other words this was a case in which both management and employees engaged in a kind of "cover up," but it's the workers who find themselves on the street, without a job or income, while Birmingham, Metzger, Stump, and the rest, came out without a scratch.

Needless to say, the Union took the case to arbitration and is waiting for an answer.