



RIDING WITH TECHNOLOGY

Prioritizing Workers and
Communities in a
Changing World

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Launched more than a century ago as a union of workers who drove teams of horses, today the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, also known as the Teamsters, is one of the nation's largest and best known transportation unions, representing workers from almost every transportation industry, especially in freight and delivery.¹ The Teamsters Joint Council 7 (JC7) represents more than 100,000 members in Northern California and Nevada, making it one of the largest unions in Silicon Valley, where many companies at the forefront of automated vehicle and drone development are located.

As the Political Director of JC7, Doug Bloch works to ensure that workers' voices are part of the conversation on the deployment of these new automated technologies. Mr. Bloch, who has testified before Congress² on automated vehicles (AVs) and worker safety issues, agreed to share his thoughts on the deployment of AVs, and the lessons he has learned from working with state and city stakeholders to create regulatory guidelines for AVs in San Francisco.

Riding the Technology Wave

When the Teamsters were formed in the early 1900s, all deliveries were made by horse: milk, bread, ice and even beer. However, it wasn't long until motorized trucks were being produced, and the union was caught in a huge internal debate over how to address this potential threat to their livelihoods. The Teamsters' general president from 1907 until 1952, Daniel Tobin, recognized that it would be impossible to stop the adoption of motorized trucks as delivery vehicles, and he led the union in adapting to rather than resisting the new paradigm; he led the Teamsters in organizing workers at the new trucking companies, and guided others to make the switch from horses and wagons to trucks.

This approach – understanding the inevitability of technological advancement, and working to adapt – has been a cornerstone of the Teamsters' philosophy over the past hundred years. Whenever there is a major technological innovation, the Teamsters engage with the companies driving that technology to understand the jobs of the future and how to make them good jobs for workers.

The current moment represents a major test for the Teamsters. Advances in robotics, automation, AVs, surveillance technology in the workplace, and the collection and use of data are all changing the relationship between workers and technology to an extent that hasn't been seen since the industrial revolution. Many of these technologies – such as advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS), automated speed controls, and navigation systems like Google Maps – have positively impacted transportation workers' lives. Therefore, the Teamsters must work to identify and encourage the adoption of technologies that augment workers' lives, while simultaneously ensuring that workers have a voice in the regulation of any technologies that could harm or disrupt their safety or livelihoods.

Building regulatory frameworks to protect workers in freight and transport

Teamsters JC7 is deeply involved in legislation and regulation on automation in many different domains. In public transit, for example, the union is supporting a bill under development at the California state legislature that would make the introduction of new technologies (including AVs) at public transportation agencies a mandatory subject for collective bargaining, in recognition of the potential impact that they could have on union members.³ This law would protect bus drivers and other public transit workers, who have responsibilities that cannot be automated, such as providing emergency aid to a passenger that is ill or injured.

Figure: Area Represented by Teamsters JC 7 (in red)



Source: Created by Washington CORE



Source: Teamsters

Photo: Teamsters and shuttle drivers in August 2015, calling on the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) to adopt a resolution ensuring labor harmony



Source: Teamsters⁶

At the city level, consistent efforts by commuter shuttle drivers, Teamsters and community members led to San Francisco's transit agency adopting a very proactive approach to considering job quality in transportation planning. Since 2015, the city has required any company working with the transportation agency to have “labor harmony” for their workers or face losing their license.⁴ This requirement extends to the city's Commuter Shuttle Program,⁵ which allows private companies such as Facebook to use Department of Transportation bus routes and bus stops for their shuttle buses.

As part of the push for the labor harmony regulation, the Teamsters Union organized shuttle bus drivers throughout the tech industry in the San Francisco area, including at Facebook, Apple, Yahoo, eBay, Evernote and other companies. The first union contract for private shuttle drivers led to a \$9.00-per-hour wage increase, which in turn spurred other regional bus company employers to negotiate with the Teamsters to raise their wages to compete with the shuttle bus companies. Overall wages for transit bus drivers in the San Francisco area have now increased by about 25%, which has improved drivers' job quality without hindering hiring or retention.

Establishing partnerships and negotiating with management

Teamsters JC7 is working to build partnerships with autonomous vehicle passenger transportation companies to implement an approach to ride-sharing that prioritizes workers' well-being and environmental impact. The agreement prioritizes electric vehicles, which emit less pollution than most of the ridesharing vehicles currently on the road, and would be built by union members. If the partnership goes through, then fleets of autonomous vehicles will be parked in garages by Teamsters members, who will also clean and maintain the vehicles. This approach would support the creation of good union jobs, while also further reducing the environmental impacts from ridesharing cars.

When it comes to labor-management discussions, the “win” is usually when each side gets some of what it wants, but not everything. These kinds of legislation and partnerships encourage labor-management relationships that support the companies that are creating good jobs, while also ensuring that workers have a voice at the table in decisions about the future.

Doug Bloch has been political director at Teamsters Joint Council 7 since 2010. In this capacity, he works with over 100,000 Teamsters in Northern California, the Central Valley, and Northern Nevada in a variety of industries. In March 2021, he was re-appointed by California Governor Gavin Newsom to the California State Commission on Health and Safety and Workers' Compensation, where he has served since 2012.

Before coming to Joint Council 7 in 2010, Bloch was the Port of Oakland Campaign Director for Change to Win from 2006 to 2010 and a Senior Research Analyst at Service Employees International Union Local 1877 from 2004 to 2006. He held several positions at the California Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) from 1999 to 2004, including Statewide Political Director and Executive Director. He was an organizer at the NGO Coordinating Committee for Northeast Thailand from 1999 to 2003.



Endnotes

¹ "Teamsters Structure," Teamsters. <https://teamster.org/about/teamsters-structure/>

² On February 2, 2022, the Subcommittee on Highways and Transit, under the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, held a hearing entitled "The Road Ahead for Automated Vehicles." The purpose of the hearing was to examine the economic and social impacts and benefits of automated vehicles (including automated trucks and buses) on mobility, infrastructure, safety, and workers.

³ AB 2441 is a bill introduced in February 2022 by California Assembly member Ash Karla, a Democrat. This bill would require public transportation agencies to provide written notice to employee representatives of any new technology that could result in the loss of worker jobs at least 12 months before the planned implementation is determined or begins. It would also require that certain information be provided to employee representatives upon their written request. In addition, it would require public transit agencies, upon receipt of a written collective bargaining request from an employee representative, to negotiate a plan to train workers affected by the introduction of new technology to fill the new jobs created by the introduction of new technology.

"AB-2441 Public employment: local public transit agencies: new vehicle technology," California Legislative Information. https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220AB2441

⁴ "Commuter Shuttle Program," SFMTA. <https://www.sfmta.com/projects/commuter-shuttleprogram>

⁵ "Teamsters Applaud SFMTA Vote Ensuring Labor Harmony for Commuter Shuttles," International Brotherhood of Teamsters. November 18, 2015. Web: <https://teamster.org/2015/11/teamstersapplaud-sfmta-vote-ensuring-labor-harmony-commuter-shuttles/>

⁶ "Teamsters Call on SFMTA to Adopt Labor Harmony Resolution," International Brotherhood of Teamsters. August 19, 2015. <https://teamster.org/2015/08/teamsters-call-sfmta-adopt-labor-harmony-resolution/>



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