

Driverless Trucks Set to Hit US Highways

アメリカでは、運転手が乗らないトラックを高速道路で走らせる新しい取り組みが進んでいます。長い距離を走り続ける物流の仕事は、私たちの生活を支える大切な役割を持っています。こうした中で、自動運転の技術がその働き方を変えるかもしれません。便利さや効率が期待される一方で、安全性を心配する声もあります。あなたは人が乗らないトラックをどう感じますか。



1. Article

Read the following article aloud.

An American company is preparing to **launch** a series of driverless trucks to transport goods on a major public highway.

Aurora Innovation says it plans to begin the service later this year in Texas with 20 tractor-trailers. The trucks will drive back and forth to transport goods between the cities of Dallas and Houston.

The Pittsburgh-based company says it hopes to **expand** the service to thousands of tractor-trailers within three to four years. Aurora says the transportation method could operate 24 hours a day. It aims to speed up the process and possibly save on transportation costs.

Aurora will continue testing for the next nine months. If all goes well, the driverless program will begin after that. At first, the trucks will be carrying loads for FedEx and other transportation partners between the companies' processing centers.

Since 2021, Aurora trucks have autonomously carried goods over 1 million kilometers on public roads. But those vehicles all had human safety drivers sitting inside.

The company said there have been three crashes involving those trucks. And, it said all of the crashes were the result of mistakes by human drivers of other vehicles. The crashes were minor and no one was hurt in them. And in each case, the company said, the Aurora truck was able to safely pull off to the side of the road.

Federal records that began in June 2021 show at least 13 crashes with other vehicles involving **autonomous** tractor-trailers. In all those cases, the crashes were caused by other vehicles changing lanes or hitting trucks from behind. Sometimes, human safety drivers took over just before the crash.

Progress in the U.S. on driverless, or autonomous, technology has slowed in recent years. Several companies had already made plans to launch self-driving taxi services in major cities. But those efforts have repeatedly faced delays.

A “robotaxi” service developed by General Motors, called Cruise, has struggled after one of its vehicles suffered a serious crash. And Alphabet's Waymo is facing **opposition** to expanding its autonomous rider service in California.

Safety groups have warned that with almost no federal rules covering autonomous vehicles, it will largely be up to companies themselves to decide when their vehicles are safe enough to operate without humans.

Critics say government agencies, including the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, could be doing more to ensure the safety of such programs. They point out that often, safety is only examined and new rules enacted after crashes happen.

But Aurora and other companies argue that years of testing demonstrate that their trucks will actually be safer than human-driven ones. They note that the vehicles' laser and radar sensors can “see” farther than any human eyes can. And the trucks never get tired like humans do. They also are not affected by alcohol or drugs.

“We want to be out there with thousands or tens of thousands of trucks on the road,” said Aurora chief Chris Urmson. “And to do that, we have to be safe, he said. “It’s the only way that the public will accept it.” Urmson, who spoke to The Associated Press, is the former head of Google’s autonomous vehicle operations.

Phil Koopman is a professor at Carnegie Mellon University who studies driverless vehicle safety. He told the AP he agrees that self-driving trucks can theoretically be safer than human-driven ones. But he warned that the vehicles' computers will at times make errors. Koopman said the trucks’ actual performance will depend on the quality of their safety engineering.

With billions of dollars in investments, Koopman said he wonders how autonomous transportation companies will balance safety decisions against cost concerns. “Everything I see indicates they’re trying to do the right thing, but the devil is in the details,” he said.

The Associated Press reported this story. Bryan Lynn adapted the report for VOA Learning English.

Source: Driverless Trucks Set to Hit US Highways

2. Key phrases and vocabulary

First repeat after your tutor and then read aloud by yourself.

1. launch (v.) to begin something new

The company plans to launch a new language program next month.

2. expand (v.) to make larger or greater

The city library hopes to expand its online services next year.

3. federal (adj.) related to the national government

Federal officials announced new airport rules on Tuesday.

4. autonomous (adj.) able to operate without human control

The university tested an autonomous robot in the science building.

5. opposition (n.) strong disagreement with a plan or idea

There was strong opposition to keeping the dam on the river.

3. Questions

Read the questions aloud and answer them.

1. What caused the crashes involving Aurora trucks, according to the company?
2. Why do safety groups worry about autonomous vehicles?
3. What does Phil Koopman say the trucks' performance will depend on?
4. Would you feel safe riding in or driving near a driverless truck? Why or why not?
5. How might driverless trucks affect or transform jobs in the transportation industry?