



## Statement of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 689

HB 1295 – Vehicle Laws - Fully Autonomous Vehicles

March 5th, 2026

**TO: The Honorable Ben Barnes and Members of the Appropriations Committee**

**FROM: Matthew Girardi, Political & Communications Director, ATU Local 689**

ATU Local 689 strongly opposes HB 1295 and urges the Appropriations Committee to stop this bill. This bill would repeat the same mistakes made in the debacle of rideshare in Maryland while allowing a dangerous technology to threaten all Marylanders' safety on the road.

At Local 689, we represent over 15,000 transit workers and retirees throughout the Washington DC Metro Area performing many skilled transportation crafts for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), MetroAccess, DASH, and MTA Commuter Bus among others. Our union helped turn low-wage, exploitative transit jobs into transit careers. We became an engine for the middle-class of this region.

Throughout the Union's history, we have had to fight tooth and nail to get fairness for our members. Be it a living wage, a secure retirement system, quality health insurance, or stable hours, Local 689 has been on the front lines of the fights to bring a decent quality of life to blue-collar workers. Indeed, when transit workers themselves began organizing, we were not given the same rights they have today. Transit workers' lives were treated as disposable. There wasn't transparency in pay. Firings were at will and hiring was discriminatory. There wasn't even a minimum wage. Sadly, in the companies pushing "autonomous vehicles," we hear echoes of the past we worked so hard to put behind us.

What we are seeing across this country is evident: when pressed, companies like Waymo must admit that autonomous vehicles are not fully autonomous. These vehicles require human intervention and assistance on occasion, sometimes with labor from other countries. However, those drivers may or may not be familiar with local traffic law and area streets. As such, the Union fully opposes this effort to potentially legalize these so-called "autonomous vehicles". Maryland drivers, workers, and pedestrians should not be experiments for companies with a product unsafe for market. HB 1295 would do just that.

In cities like Washington DC, Waymo is actively having to astroturf support for its legalization to DC Council. Likewise, it has pressured lawmakers repeatedly even though the District's report on the safety of such vehicles has not even come out yet. Is this the kind of product we want to allow to operate in Maryland?

For our part, Local 689 and our members understand that safety is paramount. When a bus crashes or a train derails, people are held accountable and systems are thoroughly reviewed. Commonsense regulation like requiring licensed, responsible, human drivers to operate vehicles is the right thing to do. Silicon Valley has repeatedly claimed the motto of "move fast and break things". But what happens when those "things" are our livelihoods, our laws, and the safety of all Marylanders?

The Union would remind lawmakers that in 2013, Uber pioneered the model making some mistakes and even flexing the boundaries of the law to gamble at the chance of being the big winner in this new market. Waymo is trying to run the same playbook, with grand announcements fueled by venture capital investments, followed by

pressure and interest to request that legislators change laws to allow them to operate.

Over a decade ago, the legal carveouts for “rideshare” platforms resulted in half a decade of subsidized transportation at a loss for the companies until the moment they had destroyed their Taxicab competitors and undermined public transit. Thereafter, those ride prices have skyrocketed. Those very same companies unveil products (e.g. Uber Shuttle) that mimic public transit.

We concur with our sister local, ATU 1300, that the only thing that TNCs substantively achieved was taking hundreds of thousands of workers out of formal W-2 employment and putting them into a shadow “gig economy.” Now, Waymo or Zoox will supposedly promise safer and even cheaper rides. Why should we believe them this time?

This is an idea that has been tested and has failed. Now we don’t need unsafe technology tested on our streets, in our neighborhoods, and with our families at risk. The Union urges the committee to vote down HB 1295 resoundingly.