

Assembly Bill 2441

Public Transit Workers

Assembly Member Ash Kalra

SUMMARY

Assembly Bill (AB) 2441 would require public transit employers to notify transit unions of their intention to procure or deploy new technologies for public transit services, including autonomous transit vehicles, at least one year prior. Additionally, employers would be required to provide the union with a detailed analysis on worker displacement, gaps in training, and plans to retrain eligible employees. Upon notification, the transit employer would be required to bargain with the union over the development and implementation of the new technology, as well as the creation of a transition or retraining plan for affected workers.

BACKGROUND

Many transit agencies have begun embracing autonomous technology. Unfortunately, the rollout of these new technologies can result in safety and equity issues, as well as the sudden displacement of public jobs.

Autonomous technologies and other products that may displace workers are enticing to transit agencies as it would allow them to save money on labor costs. However, transit employees play a critical role in facilitating a safe and smooth passenger experience for commuters and passengers across the state. In fulfilling non-driving responsibilities, workers can increase accessibility for riders with disabilities, elderly riders, riders who speak other languages, and even younger riders.

Autonomous technology extends past “self-driving,” as self-driving technology is very slowly being implemented and still has a ways to go to contend with all the variables of the road. Other autonomous technology being rolled out include camera and voice systems that seek to replicate what a transit worker would do in anticipating rider needs and answering common questions. Some autonomous technology companies also attract transit agencies by offering their own staff to perform maintenance on these systems so the transit agency does not need to keep staff in-house to work on systems issues.

SOLUTION

AB 2441 would restore and protect transit workers’ voices in the implementation of new transit services and technologies, including automated vehicles.

This bill would require transportation authorities to notify workers 12-months in advance of implementing new autonomous technologies and require the employer to discuss the implementation, training, and transitional aspects in collective bargaining.

Nothing in the bill would prohibit the use of or prevent a transit agency from exploring autonomous technology. Instead, AB 2441 rightfully recognizes these technologies often come with impacts on the existing workforce that should be reviewed. While a transit agency may score a cost-savings in labor costs, the state must be vigilant in ensuring public safety and maintaining an adequate workforce.

Together these requirements will put workers and riders’ safety at the forefront of transitions to the future of work with autonomous technology in public transit.

SPONSOR

California Conference Board of the Amalgamated Transit Union
California Teamsters Public Affairs Council

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