

Are You Ready For Autonomous Freight Trucks?

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Recently a group of [freight trucks drove across Europe autonomously](#). Daimler is now selling new [semis with autonomous driving](#) features. A Silicon Valley start-up wants to sell equipment to [retrofit existing freight trucks for autonomous driving](#).

Are you ready to share the highways with autonomous trucks?

Autonomous trucks are not driver-less trucks. Trucks still need drivers to handle city driving, parking, refueling, delivery paperwork and many other aspects of freight handling. It's during those long, boring stretches of highway driving where autonomous systems relieve drivers of some of the duller and most dangerous work.

The work is dull enough that there's currently a driver shortage. The American Trucking Associations report that the United States needs about 50,000 more truck drivers. Autonomous systems might help make the job more appealing, and maybe even make today's drivers more productive. Both outcomes would help with the driver shortage.

Autonomous trucks are designed to have fewer accidents, more predictable performance, and better fuel consumption. One way these trucks conserve fuel is by lining up in [platoons](#) to reduce wind resistance.

The trucks use a combination of video cameras and radar to sense the situation around them. That video and radar data can be enriched with other information about weather, terrain, destination and cargo, then analyzed to optimize routes, schedules, fuel consumption and more. The analysis may suggest, for example, that the truck is ahead of schedule and slow the vehicle to arrive on time and conserve fuel in the process.

If your company owns a fleet of such smart trucks, then you might benefit from

analysis spanning groups of trucks or your entire fleet. For instance, could you change schedules and routes so that more of your trucks travel in platoons to save fuel? Will the suggested changes to routes and schedules still meet your shipping agreements or delivery commitments?

For years as air travelers, we've ridden in planes with autonomous piloting and enjoyed it as the safest form of transportation. But when we're operating our cars alongside autonomous trucks, does our attitude change? Personally, I'm not sure how I'll feel passing, or being passed by, a seeming wall of platooned trucks rolling down the road.

What are your thoughts?

(Image: [whitestar1955 / 123RF Stock Photo](#))