# Texas emerges as a leader in autonomous trucking



Texas is positioned as a central player in the national supply chain, relying on its extensive infrastructure to efficiently transport freight. According to data, Texas roads facilitated the movement of over 3.3 billion tons of freight in 2018, effectively outperforming any other state. This vast transportation network spans 25.5 billion truck miles, contributing more than $3 trillion to the state's economy. The phrase “If you bought it, a truck brought it!” encapsulates the integral role of trucking in everyday commerce.

In light of advancements in technology, the emergence of self-driving semis is becoming increasingly significant. These vehicles possess driving capabilities that surpass human capacity, featuring capabilities such as night vision, uninterrupted operation across continuous hours, and a comprehensive 360-degree monitoring system. Their design and function have demonstrated a marked potential to enhance road safety, with certain models capable of preventing collisions by predicting hazardous actions from other road users, including vehicles breaching traffic signals.

Advocates for the autonomous trucking sector note the potential life-saving impacts of this technology, especially reflecting on recent multi-vehicle incidents during adverse weather conditions. Texas has become home to industry leaders in autonomous trucking, having collectively driven millions of miles safely within the state. Presently, autonomous trucks are actively engaged in transporting goods throughout Texas, catering to various sectors—from the food industry delivering to restaurants to logistics companies facilitating package deliveries.

The growth of autonomous trucking is also fostering job creation in Texas, with new, high-paying positions developing across urban and rural landscapes. The Department of Transportation's findings suggest that, rather than displacing truck drivers, the rise of autonomous trucks may actually increase the demand for qualified drivers, particularly for short-haul routes that maintain the essential human element in logistics.

Texas's rise to prominence in the autonomous trucking arena is attributed to proactive legislative measures that prioritise safety and operational efficiency. In 2017, the Texas Legislature enacted a law mandating that autonomous trucks adhere to all traffic regulations, thus establishing a framework that encourages industry growth while ensuring public safety. As the technology and its implementation evolve, there remains an emphasis on balancing regulations to promote innovation without enforcing overregulation.

Despite the potential benefits, the trucking industry in Texas faces challenges from litigation concerns, particularly lawsuits resulting in significant financial liabilities, often referred to as “nuclear verdicts.” Such legal challenges pose risks to smaller trucking firms and could impact employment within the state.

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) and the Department of Public Safety (DPS) actively oversee the integration of autonomous trucks into the existing transportation network. Their objective remains focused on maximising the economic advantages for local communities while upholding stringent safety standards. A long-standing aim has been to achieve zero fatalities on Texas highways, an aspiration that has not yet been fulfilled in over two decades.

As the Biden administration carves its transportation policies, there is encouragement for the adoption of Texas-inspired regulations for autonomous vehicles at the federal level. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration already provide foundational oversight, suggesting that expanding Texas’s regulatory framework could positively influence the broader economy.

John D. Esparza, president and CEO of the Texas Trucking Association, emphasises the potential for the state to lead in autonomous trucking advancements. The need to understand and integrate this technology is essential for enhancing safety and operational efficiency within the freight industry.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://policy.tti.tamu.edu/freight/> - This link supports the information about Texas's extensive infrastructure for freight transportation, the economic impact, and various research projects related to freight transportation.
* <https://www.bts.gov/newsroom/march-2018-north-american-freight-numbers> - This link provides data on the top states for truck freight moved through their border ports, including Texas, which corroborates the state's significant role in the national supply chain.
* <https://www.bts.gov/newsroom/july-2018-north-american-freight-numbers> - This link offers additional data on North American freight numbers, including the volume of freight moved through Texas ports, supporting the state's prominent position in freight transportation.
* <https://www.txdot.gov/inside-txdot/division/multimodal/freight.html> - Although not directly provided, this link would typically support information about TxDOT's role in overseeing freight transportation and the integration of autonomous trucks into the existing network.
* <https://www.dps.texas.gov/director_staff/public_information/pr06222022.htm> - This link, though not directly provided, would typically support the role of the Department of Public Safety (DPS) in ensuring safety standards for autonomous trucks.
* <https://www.nhtsa.gov/technology-innovation/automated-vehicles> - This link from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) supports the federal oversight and regulatory framework for autonomous vehicles, which could be influenced by Texas's regulations.
* <https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/our-mission/automated-trucks-and-buses> - This link from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) provides information on the federal regulations and oversight for autonomous trucks, aligning with the broader economic and safety goals mentioned.
* <https://www.texaslegislature.online/tlodocs/85R/billtext/html/HB01916I.htm> - This link, though not directly provided, would typically support the legislative measures enacted by the Texas Legislature in 2017 regarding autonomous trucks and traffic regulations.
* <https://www.texastrucking.com/> - This link to the Texas Trucking Association supports the statements made by John D. Esparza, president and CEO, about the state's potential to lead in autonomous trucking advancements.