

# AUTONOMOUS FLEETS: HOW CLOSE ARE THEY TO REALITY?

In a world that's becoming more and more automated, how close is the trucking industry to autonomous trucking? And how will tomorrow's professional truck drivers work differently than today's?

If there's a market that can benefit from autonomous technology, the trucking industry is it. With an economy that relies on trucking—10.5 billion tons of goods travel over American highways annually, employing about 3.5 million drivers—autonomous technology could help reduce highway congestion, improve overall safety and attract much-needed new drivers to the industry.

While "autonomous" by definition means "to act independently," when it comes to autonomous trucking, the human element is more important than ever. That's because autonomous technology isn't necessarily meant to replace human truck drivers, but augment their skills in order to improve efficiency and overall safety.

In an industry that's desperate to attract young drivers, autonomous technology could be a boon. With advances in technology, driving an autonomous truck could become very much like piloting an aircraft—a combination of automated functions augmented by human interaction. For example, long, lonesome portions of highway travel could become automated, while still requiring driver involvement for off-highway maneuvering and high traffic areas.

Recently, the first autonomous vehicle was cleared for use on highways in Colorado. The Colorado Department of Transportation, using adapted military technology and working with a host of partners, developed an autonomous work zone vehicle—the Automatic Impact Protection Vehicle (AIPV)—that travels behind construction crews to protect workers from high-speed traffic. The AIPV has a rear-mounted attenuator that will absorb or deflect impacts from vehicles that travel into work zones.

So, is the trucking industry finally reaching the era of the autonomous truck? Not quite. But the adoption of autonomous trucking technologies could usher in a new era of trucking safety and efficiency on our highways.

