PRESS RELEASE FROM THE TRANSPORT WORKERS UNION OF AMERICA

As Columbus and other cities in Ohio plan to test computer-controlled vehicles, gubernatorial candidate Richard Cordray says Bus Operators should remain on board.

“I think it’s important that we keep drivers in buses because of the important role they play in safety, and in helping riders – particularly those with disabilities and in rural areas,” Cordray said. “As a state, we must work to ensure that we’re protecting workers and good-paying jobs even as we seize the opportunities presented by automation and other new technologies. As governor, I’ll also work to improve investments in transit so that all Ohioans can easily access jobs and opportunity.”

Cordray made his comments Tuesday as the Transport Workers Union of America launched a People Before Robots (PBR) campaign and started forming a statewide coalition in Ohio to protect Bus Operators and bus riders from “unchecked and dangerous automation.”

“We’re not going to let anybody give our jobs away to robots. We’re just not,” Transport Workers Union of America President John Samuelsen said. “Bus Operators are too important to the safety of riders and the public, and these blue collar jobs are too important to working families. If the politicians and profiteers try to wipe out these jobs, they will have a massive fightback on their hands.”

This People Before Robots campaign believes that some emerging and existing collision-avoidance technology can greatly assist Bus Operators and make mass transit even safer. But technology should not replace Bus Operators.

“Technology resulting in an empty Bus Operator’s seat at the front of a bus might make billions for Wall St. investors,” Samuelsen said. “But that empty seat can’t call 911 or assist in an emergency. An empty seat can’t help our children, the elderly or the mobility challenged get on and off the bus. An empty seat can’t go off-route in a sudden emergency and make critical decisions as Bus Operators did on Sept. 11 in NYC when fanatical lunatics attacked the World Trade Center. Bus Operators helped thousands of injured and panicked victims get on city buses, and then evacuated them from the extremely dangerous conditions in Lower Manhattan that day, using their street smarts and instincts to bring them to safety.”

Andrew Jordan, the TWU Local 208 president representing about 900 Bus Operators, Mechanics and other transit workers in Columbus, said the TWU is not against change.

“We are not against technology,” he said. “We are against the unnecessary and dangerous elimination of good jobs that help the people of Ohio feed their families and send their kids to college. These are the kind of jobs that provide the foundation for working communities all over Ohio.”

TWU officially kicked off the statewide campaign during the AFL-CIO state convention in Columbus. Delegates to the Ohio State AFL-CIO 31st Biennial Convention unanimously passed the resolution pledging support.