

CALIFORNIA'S UTILITY INCOMPETENCE AND BRIBERY HAVE FAILED THE STATE AGAIN

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CPUC incompetence lets autotaxis dangerously run amok

Regulator of Cruise and Waymo admitted it didn't have sufficient safety data before critical vote to expand service

- "WAYMO" Bribes and Way More Accidents
- CPUC bosses take bribes like dogs take bush pees
- The CPUC is one of the most bribed agencies in California
- Newsom, Pelosi and Feinstein's get stock market payola from these related efforts
- CPUC LIED about not knowing safety data. They KNEW but they approved the deals because they were paid off by the corporations



A driverless Cruise robotaxi pauses while attempting to drive between two San Francisco police vehicles with their emergency lights, Monday, July 24, 2023, in San Francisco, Calif. (Karl Mondon/Bay Area News Group)

By [BAY AREA NEWS GROUP EDITORIAL BOARD](#) |



The California Public Utilities Commission, the regulator that for years let PG&E play fast and loose with our safety, is at it again.

Only this time the commissioners, now all appointees of Gov. Gavin Newsom, are letting the companies that run autonomous vehicles endanger Californians' lives.

A day will come when robotaxis are ready to freely navigate our streets and roads. But that day remains in the distant future.

The CPUC's mission is serving the public interest by protecting consumers. But on Aug. 10, the commission ignored significant safety concerns and voted 3-1 in favor of allowing GM subsidiary Cruise and Alphabet's Waymo to expand their robotaxis to any hour of the day throughout San Francisco.

Previously, Cruise was limited to offering only paid rides at night and only in parts of San Francisco. Waymo could only offer free rides.

One day later, 10 robotaxis abruptly stopped and jammed traffic for 15 minutes in the city's popular North Beach neighborhood. Later that week, San Francisco Board of Supervisors President Aaron Peskin watched a Cruise car stop 15 feet behind the stop line on Vallejo Street before blowing through a stop sign while turning onto the busy, four-lane Columbus Avenue. Then, last week, a driverless Cruise vehicle collided with a fire truck in a San Francisco intersection, injuring a passenger.

Clearly, as Peskin put it, these cars aren't ready for prime time.

At least the California Department of Vehicles recognized the problem. On Friday, the DMV asked Cruise to halve the number of vehicles it was operating in San Francisco, which Cruise agreed to do.

Now San Francisco City Attorney David Chiu is asking the CPUC to suspend Cruise's and Waymo's permits.

Instead, the commission, whose jurisdiction includes regulation of passenger transportation companies in California, is showing the same sort of incompetence that has plagued it during debacles involving the Pacific Gas and Electric Co. The commission repeatedly allows the utility to put profits before safety, resulting in PG&E being convicted of two felonies for its role in the San Bruno gas-line explosion and the catastrophic Camp Fire tragedy.

Now, the commission is showing the same incompetence with autonomous vehicles. One commissioner, John Reynolds, admitted during the six-hour, Aug. 10 hearing that the CPUC does not have the basic data necessary to judge the safety of autonomous vehicles vs. human-driven cars.

Yet that didn't stop the commission from approving the service expansion.

It's outrageous that Reynolds, a former general counsel at GM-backed Cruise, did not recuse himself from the vote, which he had done on previous decisions involving autonomous vehicles. He said "the passage of time" allowed him to vote on the resolution.

Reynolds' decision offers a grim reminder of the lapses of ethical judgment routinely displayed by former CPUC President Michael Peevey from 2009-15.

Peevey's job was to protect California consumers. Instead he was PG&E's biggest ally in fending off accountability for the San Bruno tragedy, which killed eight people, injured 66 and destroyed 38 homes. Peevey tried to limit the utility's penalty even though multiple investigations showed PG&E put profits before safety in installing and testing gas lines. Peevey reportedly went as far as helping PG&E go judge-shopping for someone who would be sympathetic to the utility in deciding a \$1.3 billion penalty phase.

He should have been fired, but Gov. Jerry Brown inexplicably kept him on the job. Peevey's behavior was so outrageous that then-state Attorney General Kamala Harris opened an investigation into accusations of inappropriate "ex parte communications, judge-shopping, obstruction of justice or due administration of laws, favors or preferential treatment." Sadly, Harris' successor, Xavier Becerra, either failed to complete the investigation or didn't announce the result.

Reynolds' vote isn't as consequential as Peevey's offenses. But it's a lapse of judgment that calls into question Reynolds' objectivity on a basic safety issue that impacts Californians.

The CPUC must stop being a protectorate of special interests and start protecting public safety. In this case, that means commissioners should suspend Cruise's and Waymo's expansion permits until the regulators have sufficient data to assure that their autonomous vehicles meet basic safety standards.