

Uber to work with UofA on mapping, self-driving cars

August 25 2015, by Astrid Galvan

Uber is partnering with the University of Arizona to develop mapping technology as the ride-hailing company expands its research of driverless car technology.

The partnership announced Tuesday between the San Francisco-based company and the university includes a \$25,000 grant to UofA's College of Optical Sciences.

"We'll work with some of the leading experts in lens design here at the university to improve the imagery of what we capture and use to build out mapping and our safety features," said Brian McClendon, vice president of advanced technology for Uber. Uber will test mapping vehicles on Tucson roads.

McClendon wouldn't elaborate on how many Uber employees would be working with university researchers but said he considers this a long-term collaboration.

"I think the College of Optical Sciences is one of the leading in the world, and we are looking for improving the technologies that mapping and driverless vehicles are dependent on, and this is a great place to start," McClendon said.

Gov. Doug Ducey hailed the new partnership during a news conference at the university Tuesday.

"It's in Arizona's best interest to embrace new technology," Ducey said. "This is about economic growth. It means new jobs, new research opportunities here at the UofA."

Ducey has been a big proponent of Uber since taking office in January. The Republican governor stopped state regulators from enforcing regulations that required Uber drivers to have commercial insurance and licenses, saying the policy wasn't working and was hampering job creation. Then he backed a bill overhauling rules for ride-hailing companies like Uber and Lyft. The new law, which Ducey signed in April, removed regulatory roadblocks to the growing services.

In June, Ducey praised Uber at the formal opening of a new customer service center in Phoenix that is expected to eventually employ several hundred people. Ducey said at the time that Uber creates jobs and helps grow the economy, and the state should be helping it, not hindering it.

Uber has made other efforts to boost its research into driverless cars.

The company partnered with Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh in February on a driverless car research lab. In March, Uber also bought digital mapping specialist deCarta, which provides maps for many consumer products, including General Motors' OnStar system.

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Citation: Uber to work with UofA on mapping, self-driving cars (2015, August 25) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-08-uber-arizona-college-self-driving-cars.html>

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