

Uber says it'll stop tracking riders after they're dropped off

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Uber will end a controversial policy of tracking some riders for five minutes after their trip ends, the ride-hailing company said Tuesday as it tries to repair its privacy reputation.

Uber was criticized by users and privacy advocates when it announced

last year that it would collect location data from riders through its app from the time the trip was requested through five minutes after it ended. Uber said it was doing so "to improve pickups, drop-offs, customer service, and to enhance safety."

Users who didn't want to be tracked after their ride ended could opt out by turning off the app's location services. But that required users to manually enter their pickup location.

Uber is "rolling back the decision to collect post-trip location for all riders," company spokeswoman Melanie Ensign said. The change was first reported by Reuters.

Uber asked all its app users for permission to collect the post-trip location data but it actually collected that data only from those with Android devices, Ensign said. Uber has "paused" that data collection, she said.

The company never started collecting the information from users with iPhones and other iOS devices, Ensign said.

The app's settings currently allow users to choose between "never" allowing the app to collect location information and "always" allowing it to collect that information anytime the app is running, even if it's in the background. The "always" option will soon change to specify that data collection will stop once a trip ends or is canceled, Uber said.

In the coming weeks, customers using iOS devices will have a third option in their settings: to allow Uber to collect location data only while the app is in use, and to stop once the trip is over, Ensign said. Any time Uber wants to access location data while the app is running in the background, the user will get a notice and can choose whether to share the information.

Uber's new policy says that "there are special circumstances, such as preventing fraud and responding to safety incidents, where Uber may collect background location for any rider in the 'While Using' setting. A notice would appear onscreen in such a case."

Uber is working on making the new privacy option available for devices using the Android operating system as well, Ensign said.

Sen. Al Franken, D-Minn., who has pressed Uber to strengthen its privacy policies, said Tuesday that he was pleased with the change.

"I'm hopeful that this announcement is the first step in Uber's renewed commitment to the privacy and security of its users," he said.

When Uber updated its privacy policy in 2015 to allow for such tracking, the Electronic Privacy Information Center filed a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission.

The privacy group said that and other changes, such as storing names and contact information from users' smartphone address books, "threaten the [privacy](#) rights and personal safety of American consumers, ignore past bad practices of the company involving the misuse of location data, pose a direct risk of consumer harm, and constitute an unfair and deceptive trade practice."

This month, Uber agreed to settle allegations by the FTC that it failed to protect users' sensitive data, including allowing employees to access rider and driver information. The failures led to a 2014 data breach that exposed the names and license numbers of thousands of Uber drivers.

The policy change on collecting rider location data comes shortly after Uber picked Dara Khosrowshahi, chief executive of travel booking website Expedia, to take over as Uber's chief executive. He would

replace the company's controversial cofounder and former CEO, Travis Kalanick, who was pressured to resign in June.

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