

# California moves toward public access for self-driving cars

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In this Jan. 8, 2017, file photo John Krafcik, CEO of Waymo Inc., the autonomous vehicle company created by Google's parent company, introduces a Chrysler Pacifica hybrid outfitted with Waymo's own suite of sensors and radar at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit. California regulators have taken an important step to clear the road for everyday people to get self-driving cars. The state's Department of Motor Vehicles on Wednesday, Oct. 11, 2017, published proposed rules that would govern the technology within California, where manufacturers have been testing hundreds of prototypes on roads and highways. (AP Photo/Paul Sancya,File)

California regulators took an important step Wednesday to clear the road for everyday people to get self-driving cars.

The state's Department of Motor Vehicles published proposed rules that would govern the technology within California, where for several years manufacturers have been testing hundreds of prototypes on roads and highways.

That testing requires a trained safety driver behind the wheel, just in case the onboard computers and sensors fail. Though companies are not ready to unleash the technology for regular drivers—most say it remains a few years away—the nation's largest state expects to have a final regulatory framework in place by June.

That framework, which could be tweaked in coming weeks, also would let companies begin testing prototypes with neither a steering wheel nor pedals—and indeed nobody at all inside. The public is unlikely to get that advanced version of the technology until several years after the deployment of cars that look and feel more like traditional, human-controlled vehicles.

Consumers probably won't be able to walk into a dealership and buy a fully driverless vehicle next year. Major automakers like Mercedes, BMW, Ford, Nissan and Volvo have all said it will be closer to 2020 before those vehicles are available, and even then, they could be confined to ride-hailing fleets and other shared applications.

Tesla Inc. says the cars it's making now have the hardware they need for full self-driving. The company is still testing the software and won't make it available to owners without regulatory approval.



In this Tuesday, Dec. 13, 2016, file photo, the Waymo driverless car is displayed during a Google event in San Francisco. California regulators have taken an important step to clear the road for everyday people to get self-driving cars. The state's Department of Motor Vehicles on Wednesday, Oct. 11, 2017, published proposed rules that would govern the technology within California, where manufacturers have been testing hundreds of prototypes on roads and highways. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg,File)

Still, Wednesday's announcement puts California on the verge of finalizing rules for public access which were due more than two years ago. The delay reflects both the developing nature of the technology as well as how the federal government—which is responsible for regulating the safety of the vehicles—has struggled to write its own rules.

Legislation intended to clear away federal regulations that could impede a new era of self-driving cars has moved quickly through Congress. The House has passed a bill that would permit automakers to seek

exemptions to safety regulations, such as to make cars without a steering wheel, so they could sell hundreds of thousands of self-driving cars. A Senate committee approved a similar measure last week by a voice vote.

California's proposed rules must still undergo a 15-day public comment period, which could result in further changes, and then a protracted review by other state attorneys. Department of Motor Vehicles attorney Brian Soublet told reporters that the rules should be final before June, if not before.

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