

Waymo self-driving rigs to haul Google cargo

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Waymo CEO John Krafcik, whose firm is competing with rival Uber in development of self-driving vehicles

Google-owned Waymo on Friday said that its self-driving trucks will haul cargo bound for the internet giant's data centers in Georgia.

Rival Uber made a similar announcement on Tuesday, saying it is using

self-driving semi trucks to augment human-driven rigs in its on-demand trucking service in the US state of Arizona.

Waymo driverless trucks will go to work in the Atlanta area Monday as part of a pilot program intended to help integrate autonomous big rigs with the operations of shippers, ports, terminals, factories, and distribution centers, according to the company.

"Our software is learning to drive big rigs in much the same way a human driver would after years of driving passenger cars," Waymo said in an online post.

"The principles are the same, but things like braking, turning, and blind spots are different with a fully-loaded truck and trailer."

Human drivers will be on board Waymo trucks to take control if needed.

Waymo for years has been testing [self-driving cars](#), racing against smartphone-summoned ride star Uber, whose trucking service uses humans to pick up cargo from Uber Freight customers and drive it in trailers to transfer hubs.

There, the trailers are hitched onto self-driving trucks for long highway hauls, according to the San Francisco-based company.

The [self-driving vehicles](#) head to transfer hubs close to their destinations, where the trailers are connected back onto human-steered rigs to complete their journeys.

Uber has been testing self-driving truck technology since 2016, and began using autonomous rigs for hauls late last year.

The company claims to have made the first commercial shipment ever

by a self-driving truck when it hauled a trailer full of Budweiser beer over about 120 miles (193 kilometers) of highway in Colorado.

Paving the road

Autonomous-vehicle technology has been touted as having potential to save fuel, ease congestion, and make transportation safer.

Waymo and Uber last month said they had settled a lawsuit over allegedly stolen trade secrets from the former Google self-driving car project.

Waymo filed the suit last year but after four days of testimony before a federal judge, Uber agreed to a financial settlement, a source said.

In September, Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao released new guidelines that permit more testing of self-driving cars and address regulation between the federal government and states.

She said self-driving technology could reduce accidents and improve mobility for the elderly, disabled and other restricted populations.

But the non-profit Consumer Watchdog warned that roads are being turned "into private laboratories for robot cars with no regard for our safety."

US states set their own rules for roads, and a handful have passed laws allowing self-driving vehicles.

California and Arizona have been particularly encouraging, hoping that companies developing autonomous technology in those states will create local jobs and facilities devoted to a promising new industry.

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