

Rolling robots could be coming to Dallas sidewalks

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A rolling robot may be coming to a Dallas sidewalk near you.

Dallas officials are considering whether to green-light a pilot of

autonomous delivery devices. The robots, which are powered by an electric battery, could deliver groceries, takeout, medicine or other items to customers' doorsteps. If it gets the City Council's blessing at a meeting later this month, the rolling robots could be deployed as early as November.

Delivery robots have become an appealing alternative for retailers and restaurants who are trying to keep up with consumers' changing habits. From meal deliveries to ride-hailing to same-day deliveries, customers have gotten used to ordering online or through an app and then getting what they want on-demand - or at least in a few hours.

Delivery by robot has already been tested in major cities, including Austin, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C. The first of the rolling robots in Dallas could be from San Francisco-based robotics company Marble, according to Michael Rogers, director of the city's department of transportation. The robots - about the size of a motorized wheelchair - would travel at the maximum of 10 mph for 1 or 2 miles. They use sensors and cameras to detect and autonomously steer around obstacles like cyclists, dogs and fire hydrants. For the pilot, however, the number of devices would be limited and a human would walk behind the device to monitor its safety, he said.

Rogers gave a briefing on the autonomous delivery devices Aug. 20, to the city's Mobility Solutions, Infrastructure and Sustainability Committee. He said the pilot would have upsides for the city: It would reduce the number of delivery trucks congesting the roads, decrease emissions from vehicles and provide surveying data on the condition of the city's sidewalks.

Rogers said the robots would use sidewalks and crosswalks, but would not operate on trails or roadways. They would be required to obey traffic laws and yield to pedestrians, bicycles, skateboards and more. Each

would be marked with the operating company's website address and contact information.

Rogers recommended setting a time limit for a pilot and requiring each company to pay an \$808 permit fee and show proof of liability insurance. Each robot has a high price tag, so he said he wouldn't expect more than four or five per company.

On its website, Marble describes its autonomous delivery devices as "your friendly neighborhood robot." The company is in discussions with retailers to transport customers' purchases. It has not publicly announced any clients, said Jackie Erickson, Marble's director of communications and government relations, but many suggested Dallas as a test market.

The startup, founded by three Carnegie Mellon University graduates, is testing its robots about an hour east of San Francisco in Concord, Calif. It's begun mapping some streets in Arlington and is discussing a pilot with a city in Nevada, Erickson said. Last year, it ran a meal delivery pilot in San Francisco with Yelp 324, a food delivery business that the online review company acquired.

Erickson said Marble would like to have its robots in Dallas in the fall or winter. She said "robot ambassadors" would initially tag along with the deliveries. Customers open the robot by punching in a special code that they receive after their purchase.

At Monday's meeting in Dallas, the idea of the delivery robots was greeted with enthusiasm. Council member Lee Kleinman said Dallas could be a leader in the state for the delivery vehicles. He said he did not want the city to stand in the way of companies.

After watching a YouTube video of a Marble [robot](#), council member Sandy Greyson said they looked "very cool, very hip." Even if it takes

just a few cars off the road, she said, it would be an improvement. But she joked about whether the autonomous [delivery](#) devices would be able to detect potholes before they fall into them.

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