

Waymo revs up self-driving car making near Motor City

January 22 2019



Waymo, the former Google car unit of Alphabet, will establish its own factory in Michigan to install self-driving technology into vehicles in its fleet

Waymo on Tuesday announced it will rev up its self-driving car production by establishing a factory devoted exclusively to mass production of autonomous vehicles in Michigan.

The company owned by Google-parent Alphabet collaborated with Michigan's economic development corporation on a plan to use a manufacturing facility in that state for integrating self-driving technology into vehicles it adds to its fleet.

Waymo already has about 20 workers based in the southeast Michigan city of Novi.

The location of the new plant has yet to be determined, but was not expected to be too far from Detroit, nicknamed "Motor City" due to the role the auto industry has played there.

The Waymo project was to create 100 jobs, with the potential for that number to multiply as it produces vehicles capable of "level 4" autonomy on a scale where level 5 is fully autonomous without a need for human intervention.

The facility "will be the world's first factory 100 percent dedicated to the mass production of L4 autonomous vehicles," Waymo said in an online statement.

The plant will integrate the self-driving system into the vehicles for the Waymo fleet, including from Fiat Chrysler Automobiles and Jaguar Land Rover.

"We're laying the foundation for a scalable, robust vehicle integration plan, starting in Michigan," according to Waymo, which is partnering with the Canadian-based automotive supplier Magna to help integrate the technology into various vehicles.

Investment in the project was expected to tally \$13.6 million and result in a performance-based grant of as much as \$8 million from a Michigan business development program.

"Our local engineers are already hard at work outfitting our Chrysler Pacifica hybrid minivans with Waymo technology, and now we're looking forward to expanding our roots," the company said.

Born in a Google lab devoted to big-vision new technology, Waymo became a subsidiary of Alphabet in 2016.

A self-driving car service being tested by Waymo opened up to more people in the Phoenix, Arizona, area, late last year.

Those taking part in the service can use a smartphone application to summon autonomous vehicles any time of day to get about in an area about 100 square miles at its maximum, according to Waymo chief John Krafcik.

Waymo expected businesses to be interested in using the autonomous ride service to carry customers to and from shops.

The firm last year announced it was adding as many as 62,000 Fiat Chrysler minivans to its autonomous fleet in an expanded collaboration announced by the companies.

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Citation: Waymo revs up self-driving car making near Motor City (2019, January 22) retrieved 23 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2019-01-google-self-driving-waymo-factory-michigan.html>

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