

Uber self-driving cars are coming back to California roads

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In this Tuesday, Dec. 13, 2016 file photo, an Uber car in driverless mode waits in traffic during a test drive in San Francisco. Uber's self-driving cars will return to California's streets. But the company doesn't plan to pick up passengers for now. The California Department of Motor Vehicles said Wednesday, March 8, 2017, it has granted Uber permission to run two Volvo SUVs on public roads. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg, File)

Uber's self-driving cars will return to California's streets, though the ride-hailing company doesn't immediately plan to pick up passengers.

Uber received permits Wednesday to run two Volvo SUVs on public roads, the California Department of Motor Vehicles said. Regulators also approved 48 people as backup drivers who must sit behind the wheel in case the prototype cars malfunction, according to agency spokeswoman Jessica Gonzalez.

The permits resolve a conflict dating to December, when Uber—an aggressive player in the self-driving race to market—rolled out a self-driving car pilot program in San Francisco without the approval of state regulators.

Uber knew about the DMV's permit requirement but argued that its cars do not meet the state's definition of an "autonomous vehicle" because they need a person to monitor them and intervene if needed.

Amid a several-days showdown, during which several self-driving Uber SUVs did not stop for red lights, state prosecutors threatened to haul Uber before a judge if the service was not suspended immediately.

Uber responded by packing up its cars for Arizona, where it began picking up passengers last month.

Uber said in a statement Wednesday that it does not plan to pick up paying passengers for now, as it does in Pittsburgh and a Phoenix suburb. The company did not say when the two Volvos would be on public roads.

With the approval, Uber becomes the 26th company to have self-driving car testing permits in California.

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