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2 Proposals Open Door to Free Driverless Testing Programs

If the pilot programs are approved, the utility commission will begin crafting "a broader framework" allowing companies to accept paying passenger.

By Cheryl Miller | April 06, 2018

Autonomous vehicle companies could start offering free test rides to the public later this year under **one of two**



A Waymo driverless car. Courtesy.

pilot programs proposed Friday

(<http://docs.cpuc.ca.gov/PublishedDocs/Efile/G000/M212/K643/212643106.PDF>)

by the California Public Utilities Commission.

The other test program would authorize free autonomous vehicle rides in cars with a trained driver behind the wheel. Both pilot programs must be approved by the full commission.

“These proposals allow the introduction of AVs into passenger service to the public on a pilot basis, while providing for the safety and consumer protection of the passengers, consistent with the commission’s regulation of private passenger-carrying transportation entities,” PUC Commissioner Liane Randolph wrote in the 44-page document.

If the pilot programs are approved, the PUC will begin crafting “a broader framework” allowing companies to accept paying passengers in their autonomous vehicles, according to an agency statement.

As the proposals were released Friday afternoon, the Department of Motor Vehicles confirmed that it has received an application to test autonomous cars without a driver on state roads. The application period opened on Monday after regulations, under review for months, were enacted.

DMV spokeswoman Jessica Gonzalez said the DMV won’t release the name of the company seeking the testing permit until the agency determines the paperwork is complete. That could happen as soon as April 12, she said.

Fifty-two companies

(<http://docs.cpuc.ca.gov/PublishedDocs/Efile/G000/M212/K643/212643106.PDF>)

held permits to test “drivered” autonomous vehicles as of April 1, according to the DMV. No company is permitted in California to transport passengers, although some

have taken reporters and government officials for test rides. Waymo has offered **free test rides (<https://waymo.com/apply/>)** to passengers in Arizona since last year.

At the time Randolph wrote her order, only two companies, Lyft Inc. and Uber Advanced Technologies Group—Uber’s autonomous testing arm—had obtained both an autonomous vehicle testing permit from the DMV and a transportation charter permit while listing driverless cars as part of their fleets.

Uber has **since announced (<https://www.law.com/therecorder/2018/03/27/uber-drops-driverless-car-tests-in-california-after-fatal-crash-in-arizona/>)** it would not renew its DMV testing permit, which expired on March 31. The company suspended testing nationwide after one of its cars operating in autonomous mode **struck and killed a pedestrian (<https://www.law.com/therecorder/2018/03/19/first-fatal-accident-involving-autonomous-uber-car-raises-novel-legal-issues/>)** in Tempe, Arizona, on March 18.

A Lyft spokeswoman did not respond to a message seeking comment.

Both pilot programs would require companies to comply with certain restrictions.

All cars in the program would have to be road-tested for at least 90 days before accepting passengers. Airports would be off-limits. Permit holders would have to report all communications between passengers and the vehicles’ remote operators and to submit publicly available data to the PUC every month. Every car would also have to comply with the DMV’s safety and operations rules.

The commission is scheduled to vote on the program proposal on May 10.

The proposals are posted below:

To print the document, click the "Original Document" link to open the original PDF. At this time it is not possible to print the document with annotations.

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[Uber Drops Driverless Car Tests in California After Fatal Crash in Arizona](https://at.law.com/FsAo2c?cmp=share_twitter)
(https://at.law.com/FsAo2c?cmp=share_twitter)

[Family of Victim in Uber Autonomous Vehicle Crash Reaches Settlement](https://at.law.com/13f3Sa?cmp=share_twitter)
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[First Fatal Accident Involving Autonomous Uber Car Raises Novel Legal Issue](https://at.law.com/aSneXq?cmp=share_twitter)
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