# Waymo prepares to launch autonomous taxis in London amid regulatory and public challenges



Waymo, the autonomous vehicle subsidiary of Alphabet, is preparing to launch its self-driving taxi service in London, marking its first European expansion and a significant milestone in the global rollout of robotaxi services. The company plans to introduce a small fleet of all-electric Jaguar I-Pace vehicles equipped with advanced sensors and AI technology in the coming weeks, aiming for a fully autonomous operation by 2026.

The announcement follows Waymo's extensive experience in the United States, where it operates over 1,500 autonomous vehicles providing approximately 250,000 paid rides weekly across cities such as San Francisco, Phoenix, Los Angeles, Atlanta, and Austin. The company claims that its autonomous cars have travelled over 100 million miles with a safety record indicating five times fewer injury-causing collisions and eleven times fewer serious injuries compared to human drivers. However, incidents including minor injury collisions and at least one fatality indicate that autonomous vehicles still face challenges in unpredictable real-world conditions.

During a recent trial in San Francisco, a passenger described the experience of riding in a Waymo taxi as eerily smooth yet slightly unnerving, with the car performing all driving functions without a person in the driver's seat. The vehicle’s 360-degree sensor system monitors traffic, pedestrians, and cyclists, obeying speed limits and navigating intersections with notable patience and precision. Passengers can control the in-car environment via a touchscreen interface that also displays real-time surroundings, enhancing the overall ride experience.

To comply with regulatory frameworks, Waymo will begin operations in London with human safety drivers overseeing the vehicles during testing phases to secure government approval. The rollout aligns with the UK's Automated Vehicles Act, which requires autonomous cars to demonstrate safety standards comparable to competent human drivers. Transport for London will enforce local rules, overseeing the licensing and integration of these vehicles alongside traditional black cabs and other taxi services. The broader government supports these initiatives, anticipating that the autonomous vehicle sector could create around 38,000 jobs by 2035, particularly in fleet management, vehicle maintenance, and depot operations.

Waymo is partnering with the vehicle fleet specialist Moove to manage operations and charging infrastructure in London, leveraging local expertise. The company’s UK launch follows experiments in Japan, although no commercial service has yet commenced there. The service's pricing in London is expected to be slightly higher than traditional ride-hailing options, mirroring fares in U.S. cities where Waymo rides cost roughly 28% more than comparable Uber or Bolt fares.

The arrival of autonomous taxis in London comes amid growing public debate. A 2024 RAC Foundation survey found that while 45% of Londoners are open to riding in driverless vehicles, 38% remain uneasy, mainly citing safety concerns. Ethical questions persist about how AI should respond to potential accident scenarios and whether human oversight can scale efficiently for larger fleets.

London represents a distinctive challenge with its narrow, congested streets and complex traffic conditions that surpass those in many American cities. However, the city's ambition to reduce road injuries and improve transport options dovetails with Waymo's technology goals. Advocacy groups, including the Royal National Institute of Blind People, highlight autonomous vehicles' potential to enhance mobility for visually impaired passengers, offering independence previously unattainable.

Waymo enters a competitive and evolving market. British competitor Wayve, in partnership with Uber, is also set to trial Level 4 autonomous ride services in London around 2026. Meanwhile, global players like Baidu—the leading robotaxi operator in China—are targeting European markets with plans to launch driverless taxi services in the UK and Germany alongside partnerships with Lyft.

Despite the promise of safer roads, reduced emissions, and job creation, autonomous taxi services face hurdles in public acceptance, pricing, regulation, and technological adaptation to Europe's unique urban environments. Waymo’s London fleet will serve as a crucial proving ground, testing whether fully autonomous ride-hailing can thrive in one of the world's most challenging and congested cities.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.mylondon.news/news/transport/i-tried-self-driving-taxi-32704266), [[6]](https://techcrunch.com/2025/10/15/waymo-plans-to-launch-a-robotaxi-service-in-london-in-2026/), [[4]](https://www.techradar.com/vehicle-tech/hybrid-electric-vehicles/5-things-to-expect-from-waymos-autonomous-taxi-rides-in-london-from-pricing-to-in-car-music)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.mylondon.news/news/transport/i-tried-self-driving-taxi-32704266), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/business/autos-transportation/waymo-launch-autonomous-ride-hailing-service-london-next-year-2025-10-15/), [[6]](https://techcrunch.com/2025/10/15/waymo-plans-to-launch-a-robotaxi-service-in-london-in-2026/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.mylondon.news/news/transport/i-tried-self-driving-taxi-32704266)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.mylondon.news/news/transport/i-tried-self-driving-taxi-32704266), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/1bcf0ea7e2a4992cc1588cf837e0de5e), [[5]](https://www.britannica.com/news/346821/1bcf0ea7e2a4992cc1588cf837e0de5e), [[6]](https://techcrunch.com/2025/10/15/waymo-plans-to-launch-a-robotaxi-service-in-london-in-2026/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.mylondon.news/news/transport/i-tried-self-driving-taxi-32704266), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/business/autos-transportation/waymo-launch-autonomous-ride-hailing-service-london-next-year-2025-10-15/), [[6]](https://techcrunch.com/2025/10/15/waymo-plans-to-launch-a-robotaxi-service-in-london-in-2026/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.mylondon.news/news/transport/i-tried-self-driving-taxi-32704266), [[4]](https://www.techradar.com/vehicle-tech/hybrid-electric-vehicles/5-things-to-expect-from-waymos-autonomous-taxi-rides-in-london-from-pricing-to-in-car-music)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.mylondon.news/news/transport/i-tried-self-driving-taxi-32704266), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/1bcf0ea7e2a4992cc1588cf837e0de5e), [[5]](https://www.britannica.com/news/346821/1bcf0ea7e2a4992cc1588cf837e0de5e)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.mylondon.news/news/transport/i-tried-self-driving-taxi-32704266), [[4]](https://www.techradar.com/vehicle-tech/hybrid-electric-vehicles/5-things-to-expect-from-waymos-autonomous-taxi-rides-in-london-from-pricing-to-in-car-music), [[7]](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/economy/article/2025/08/23/baidu-china-s-robotaxi-leader-sets-sights-on-europe_6744658_19.html)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.mylondon.news/news/transport/i-tried-self-driving-taxi-32704266> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://apnews.com/article/1bcf0ea7e2a4992cc1588cf837e0de5e> - Waymo, the autonomous vehicle subsidiary of Alphabet, has announced plans to launch its driverless taxi service in London by 2026. Testing of self-driving vehicles, initially with human safety drivers, will commence soon to secure government approval. This expansion follows Waymo's previous international ventures, including a partnership in Japan earlier this year, though that project has yet to launch commercially. Currently, Waymo operates in several U.S. cities, including Phoenix, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Atlanta, and Austin, and aims to comply with the UK's new self-driving regulations, which require autonomous vehicles to match the safety performance of competent human drivers and undergo rigorous testing. Additionally, Waymo must adhere to local rules set by Transport for London, the authority overseeing the city's taxi services. The company is expected to participate in a government-backed pilot program for small-scale autonomous taxi and bus services launching in spring 2026.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/business/autos-transportation/waymo-launch-autonomous-ride-hailing-service-london-next-year-2025-10-15/> - Alphabet's autonomous driving subsidiary, Waymo, has announced plans to launch its fully driverless ride-hailing service in London in 2026. This marks a significant international expansion for the company, which currently operates over 1,500 autonomous vehicles in several U.S. cities, providing more than 250,000 paid rides weekly. To prepare for the UK rollout, Waymo is partnering with vehicle financing company Moove to manage fleet operations and charging infrastructure and is actively working with local and national regulators to gain necessary approvals. Safety drivers will begin testing in London prior to the launch of full autonomy. This move follows Waymo’s data collection and testing with human drivers in Tokyo in partnership with local firms and comes as competition in the autonomous vehicle space heats up, with Tesla launching robotaxi services in the U.S. and Uber teaming with UK-based Wayve to trial driverless rides in 2026. The announcement also highlights the broader difficulty faced by automakers trying to commercialize self-driving technology amid safety concerns and regulatory challenges in the U.S.
4. <https://www.techradar.com/vehicle-tech/hybrid-electric-vehicles/5-things-to-expect-from-waymos-autonomous-taxi-rides-in-london-from-pricing-to-in-car-music> - Waymo is set to launch its autonomous taxi service in London in 2026, marking its first European expansion. Testing is already underway in over 20 boroughs, suggesting service availability well beyond central London. The fleet will feature all-electric Jaguar I-Pace vehicles equipped with Waymo’s advanced sensor and camera system for full self-driving capability. Pricing is expected to be slightly higher than traditional ride-hailing services like Uber, with fares possibly mirroring those in San Francisco (about £15 per ride). Despite the premium, Waymo continues to grow in the U.S., now providing over 250,000 rides weekly across several cities. Passengers can expect an enhanced in-car experience thanks to partnerships with Spotify and YouTube Music, allowing them to stream music via QR code sync and customize audio settings. The Waymo One app will be used for ride booking and payment, although integration with the Uber app in London remains unconfirmed. While the UK Government supports the move for its potential benefits in safety, jobs, and transport innovation, critics like those from the Licensed Taxi Drivers’ Association question its necessity. British competitor Wayve is also entering the scene, partnering with Uber to test Level 4 autonomy in London.
5. <https://www.britannica.com/news/346821/1bcf0ea7e2a4992cc1588cf837e0de5e> - Robotaxi pioneer Waymo plans to expand to London next year, marking the company’s latest step in rolling out its driverless ride service internationally. Waymo said Wednesday that it will start testing its self-driving cars on London streets in the coming weeks — with a human “safety driver” behind the wheel — as it seeks to win government approval for its services. In a blog post, Waymo said it will “lay the groundwork” for its London service in the coming months. The company said it will “continue to engage with local and national leaders to secure the necessary permissions for our commercial ride-hailing service.” Waymo’s self-driving taxis have been operating in the United States for years, and currently serve the cities of Phoenix, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Atlanta and Austin. This year, the company made its first moves to expand internationally by teaming up with local partners in Japan for testing, though no launch date has been set for commercial service there. The company began as a secret project within Google and was then spun out from the tech giant. Waymo will have to follow new U.K. regulations on self-driving cars that pave the way for autonomous vehicles to take to the country’s roads. They require self-driving cars to have a safety level “at least as high as careful and competent human drivers” and meet rigorous safety checks. The company will be able to take part in a pilot program for “small-scale" self-driving taxi and bus services that the government plans for spring 2026. Waymo will also have to stick to rules from Transport for London, the city's transport authority, which oversees licensing for its famous traditional black cabs as well as other taxi operators like Uber.
6. <https://techcrunch.com/2025/10/15/waymo-plans-to-launch-a-robotaxi-service-in-london-in-2026/> - Waymo said on Wednesday it will offer a commercial robotaxi service in London in 2026, marking the Alphabet-owned company’s second international expansion following Tokyo. The announcement follows weeks of speculation fueled by a couple of London-based job postings. Waymo already has ties to the U.K: In 2019, the company acquired Latent Logic, a U.K. startup spun out of Oxford University’s computer science department that uses a form of machine learning called imitation learning to make self-driving car simulation more realistic. Waymo launched an engineering hub in Oxford as part of the acquisition. In a blog post, Waymo said its all-electric Jaguar I-Pace vehicles — equipped with self-driving technology — will begin driving on London’s public roads in the coming weeks. Waymo will start with human safety drivers behind the wheel before it launches driverless testing and eventually invites the public to hail its robotaxis, a strategy that it has used in other commercial markets such as Phoenix and San Francisco. Waymo wouldn’t provide further details on when it would remove the human safety driver, or the size of the testing fleet. Waymo spokesperson Ethan Teicher did confirm the company intends to operate a self-driving car service for public riders next year. When that robotaxi service launches in 2026 will depend on the U.K. government finalizing its approval process for those operations. Waymo has increasingly tapped partners to share the load of operating a robotaxi service, and similarly plans to use Moove, which already manages its autonomous vehicles (AVs) in Phoenix, to handle fleet operations in London. In Austin and Atlanta, its partner Uber splits the responsibilities of owning and operating a fleet of driverless vehicles, handling the charging, maintenance, and cleaning of the AVs, and managing access to the robotaxis via its app. Meanwhile, Waymo monitors the tech and the autonomous operations, including roadside assistance and certain aspects of rider support. San Francisco | October 27-29, 2025
7. <https://www.lemonde.fr/en/economy/article/2025/08/23/baidu-china-s-robotaxi-leader-sets-sights-on-europe_6744658_19.html> - Baidu, China's leading robotaxi company, plans to expand into Europe, partnering with Lyft to launch autonomous taxi services in Germany and the UK starting in 2026. These Level 4 autonomous vehicles, which can operate without a driver within designated areas, will be integrated into the Lyft app. This move builds on Baidu's existing Apollo Go service in China and global expansion efforts that include partnerships with Uber in Asia and the Middle East. As of 2024, 16 urban fleets of driverless robotaxis operated globally—12 in China and four in the U.S. Baidu alone had conducted over five million rides and covered 100 million kilometers. However, Europe lags behind due to limited investment, regulatory caution, and a less supportive ecosystem. European carmakers have prioritized electrification over full automation. Challenges in Europe include regulatory hurdles, infrastructure readiness, and public skepticism—especially regarding safety and job displacement. Despite strong safety records claimed by companies like Waymo and Baidu, public acceptance remains the primary barrier to deployment.