# DfT advances timeline for driverless taxis and bus services to 2026



The Department for Transport (DfT) has accelerated its plans to allow autonomous vehicles on roads across England, moving the expected timeline forward by a year. The introduction of fully driverless taxis and bus-like services is now anticipated as early as spring 2026, marking a significant milestone for the UK’s ambitions in the autonomous vehicle sector.

This development heralds a new era in transportation, enabling companies to trial commercial services without a human driver present to monitor activities. Such a move aligns with the broader strategy outlined in the Automated Vehicles Act, which, while still subject to local authority approvals and compliance with safety regulations, is set to provide a legal framework that could redefine public transport in the UK.

Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander expressed her enthusiasm about this technological shift, emphasising that it could stimulate job creation and invigorate investment. “The future of transport is arriving,” she stated, highlighting the potential for the UK to position itself as a global leader in innovative technologies. With projections suggesting that the autonomous vehicle industry could contribute an impressive £42 billion to the economy and create approximately 38,000 jobs by 2035, this initiative underscores the government’s commitment to fostering economic growth through innovation.

However, the UK faces stiff competition from established markets, particularly the United States and China, which have already begun to implement automated transport solutions. Companies such as Waymo in the US and various Chinese firms have been refining driverless technologies with considerable success. To remain competitive, UK leaders argue that the regulatory process must evolve to facilitate rather than hinder the deployment of these transformative technologies.

The DfT's initiative is part of a larger narrative concerning the regulatory landscape for autonomous vehicles. The new Automated Vehicles Bill aims to establish comprehensive regulations prioritising safety and clear liability. A significant statistic informs this ongoing dialogue: as noted, human error contributes to 88% of road collisions, and proponents of self-driving technology assert that it could dramatically reduce accidents linked to driver-related issues such as fatigue, speeding, and impaired driving.

A crucial element of this ambitious plan is the £150 million in government funding allocated to bolster the UK’s connected and automated mobility capabilities over the next several years. This investment is strategically directed towards enhancing the UK’s status as a hub for the design and development of self-driving technologies and services. It aligns with broader government initiatives encapsulated in the Advanced Manufacturing Plan, which seeks to stimulate economic development and innovation across various sectors.

Looking ahead, the prospects for autonomous vehicles in the UK appear promising. If all goes according to plan, individuals could find themselves travelling in self-driving taxis—potentially while engaging in tasks as trivial as checking emails—by 2026. Moreover, the government is exploring additional transport innovations, including flying taxis, under a separate initiative that aims to introduce aerial transport solutions by 2028. Such advancements could profoundly transform urban mobility, offering a glimpse into the future of transportation across the country.

As these developments unfold, it will be essential for all stakeholders to navigate the complexities of safety, regulation, and public acceptance to ensure that the potential benefits of autonomous transport technology are realised.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.swindonadvertiser.co.uk/news/25227792.will-self-driving-taxis-allowed/), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/4c9f4025-ec0b-4cdb-9ba5-1c3e77041487)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.swindonadvertiser.co.uk/news/25227792.will-self-driving-taxis-allowed/), [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-laws-to-safely-roll-out-self-driving-vehicles-across-british-roads), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/dec/27/self-driving-cars-could-be-on-uk-roads-by-2026-says-transport-secretary)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/4c9f4025-ec0b-4cdb-9ba5-1c3e77041487), [[4]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-government-funding-to-boost-self-driving-transport-technologies)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-laws-to-safely-roll-out-self-driving-vehicles-across-british-roads), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/dec/27/self-driving-cars-could-be-on-uk-roads-by-2026-says-transport-secretary)
* Paragraph 5 – [[6]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/over-20-million-to-help-drones-and-flying-taxis-take-to-uk-skies)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.swindonadvertiser.co.uk/news/25227792.will-self-driving-taxis-allowed/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/4c9f4025-ec0b-4cdb-9ba5-1c3e77041487> - The UK is set to begin commercial trials of fully driverless taxi services in spring 2026, a year ahead of schedule, in an effort to compete globally with the US and China in autonomous vehicle technology. Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander announced the initiative, projecting that the autonomous vehicle industry could add £42 billion to the UK economy and create 38,000 jobs by 2035. The trials, legalized under the UK Automated Vehicles Act and subject to local authority approval and safety compliance, will deploy limited numbers of robotaxis and self-driving bus-like services without human drivers. Uber and UK-based Wayve plan to collaborate to launch one of the first driverless taxi services in London, pending regulatory approval. The UK lags behind the US and China in driverless technology deployment, with Waymo operating wide-scale services in the US and Chinese firms like Pony.ai and Baidu running extensive pilot programs. Industry leaders emphasize the need for streamlined regulatory processes to prevent further delays and ensure the UK remains competitive in the autonomous transport sector.
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-laws-to-safely-roll-out-self-driving-vehicles-across-british-roads> - New laws introduced into Parliament will put safety at the heart of the roll-out of self-driving vehicle technology and position the UK as world-leaders in this exciting £42 billion industry. The Automated Vehicles (AV) Bill will deliver one of the most comprehensive legal frameworks of its kind anywhere in the world for self-driving vehicles, with safety at its core. The new safety framework will ensure clear liability for the user, set the safety threshold for legal self-driving, and establish an in-use regulatory scheme to monitor the ongoing safety of these vehicles. Self-driving vehicles could help reduce deaths and injuries from drink driving, speeding, and driver tiredness, with 88% of road collisions having human error as a contributory factor.
4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-government-funding-to-boost-self-driving-transport-technologies> - The UK government has announced up to £150 million of funding to 2030 to support the UK’s position among world leaders in self-driving technologies. This funding will be delivered to eight sectors that are key to economic growth, energy security, and levelling up, including up to £150 million for Connected and Automated Mobility (CAM) to 2030. This landmark funding package forms a part of the Advanced Manufacturing Plan, which sets out the government’s plans for investing in the future of manufacturing, opening markets, and removing obstacles for business. This Government funding for CAM will be matched by industry and enable the UK’s Centre for Connected and Autonomous Vehicles (CCAV) to cement the UK’s place among world leaders for designing, developing, deploying, and manufacturing self-driving technologies, products, and services.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/dec/27/self-driving-cars-could-be-on-uk-roads-by-2026-says-transport-secretary> - Autonomous vehicles could be on UK roads as soon as 2026, the transport secretary has said, as ministers seek to capture as much as £42bn of the international self-driving market within the coming decade. Mark Harper said the technology exists and works, and the government is putting in place the proper legislation so that people can have full confidence in the safety of this technology. Asked if people would be able to travel in self-driving vehicles 'with your hands off the wheel, doing your emails' in 2026, Harper replied: 'Yes, and I think that’s when companies are expecting – in 2026, during that year – that we’ll start seeing this technology rolled out.'
6. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/over-20-million-to-help-drones-and-flying-taxis-take-to-uk-skies> - The UK government has announced over £20 million funding to launch new flight technologies, including drone operations for emergency services and eco-friendly flying taxi services. This funding will support the regulatory pathway that could see air taxis in use from 2028. The investment aims to advance aviation technology to support healthcare for the NHS, assist police forces in combating crime, help inspect and survey critical infrastructure, and unlock delivery services for businesses and communities across the country. The funding is designed to advance aviation tech to support healthcare for the NHS, assist police forces in combating crime, help inspect and survey critical infrastructure, and unlock delivery services for businesses and communities across the country.