

Autonomous Shuttles Ferry COVID-19 Tests Around Florida

The Jacksonville Transportation Authority, Beep and NAVYA teamed up with Mayo Clinic to transport novel coronavirus samples in self-driving vans.

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Healthcare workers will accept all the relief they can get during these difficult days. In northeastern Florida, that relief now comes in the form of autonomous shuttles. The Jacksonville Transportation Authority (JTA), Beep and NAVYA are ferrying COVID-19 tests around in self-driving vans.

Four fully autonomous vehicles have been running every day since March 30, transporting secure containers of coronavirus samples from a drive-thru testing site to a processing lab at the Mayo Clinic campus. All routes are allegedly “isolated from pedestrians, traffic and staff,” according to the non-profit medical center.

“Using artificial intelligence enables us to protect staff from exposure to this contagious virus by using cutting-edge autonomous vehicle technology and frees up staff time that can be dedicated to direct treatment and care for patients,” Kent Thielen, CEO of Mayo Clinic in Florida, said in a statement. “We are grateful to JTA, Beep and NAVYA for their partnership in these challenging times.”

[embedded content]

The Jacksonville Transportation Authority has been piloting

autonomous vehicle technology for three years. But in these already uncertain times, the agency is taking no chances when it comes to transporting precious cargo: Each shuttle is tailed by a human-operated SUV, provided by the JTA to “ensure no traffic or pedestrians would potentially impact the delivery path of the COVID-19 samples and supplies,” Beep CEO Joe Moyer told The Verge.

Alongside these shadow cars, Beep, Mayo Clinic and JTA are “closely monitor[ing] the service” from a mobile command center “to maintain safe operation,” a press release explained.

“The opportunity to work together with these organizations in an effort to provide a dedicated COVID-19 testing solution represents our goal as a company,” NAVYA CEO Étienne Hermite said. “That’s to create a more accessible solution in the moments that matter, whether that be crisis, shortage in manpower and resources, or other areas [in which] we can provide aid.”

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