

Traffic Jam Caused by Self-Driving Cars in San Francisco Sparks Outcry and Safety Concerns

Last Thursday, California regulators granted approval for robotaxi companies to have their vehicles operate around the clock in San Francisco. A day later, chaos ensued.

Videos shared on X, formerly known as Twitter, displayed approximately 10 stationary Cruise vehicles (a self-driving car company) in San Francisco's North Beach district on Friday, where the Outside Lands music festival was occurring nearby. Residents called out Cruise self-driving cars on social media for triggering a major traffic jam, CNN reported.

One user who documented the incident described it as a "complete meltdown."

@Cruise self-driving operations had a complete meltdown earlier in North Beach. We overheard on the scanner that all Cruise vehicle agents were tied up at the time (not literally) and so North Beach was going to get a delayed response. But wow, WTF! pic.twitter.com/D89xrSxAdu

– FriscoLive415 (@friscolive415) August 12, 2023

The traffic jam occurred just a day after the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), responsible for overseeing self-driving cars in the state, voted 3-to-1 in favor of Waymo and Cruise expanding their services and granting approval for robotaxi companies to have their autonomous vehicles operate 24/7 throughout the city.

Witnesses told CNN affiliate KPIX-TV that the driverless cars

obstructed intersections for around 15 minutes on Friday evening, triggering concerns that emergency vehicles might be hindered from reaching the area.

Self-driving cars were granted approval to operate throughout San Francisco 24/7 on Thursday August 10. Tayfun Coskun/Anadolu Agency | Getty Images

Cruise responded to the social media outrage on X stating, “We are actively investigating and working on solutions to prevent this from happening again. We apologize to those who were impacted.”

Still, the response on social media has been less than forgiving.

So apparently @cruise vehicles don't know that they need to

come to a complete stop when a pedestrian is in a marked crosswalk.

Just had one pass my dog and me within 2ft. This is not the safe, law-following behavior I was promised.

– Dan Federman @dfed.me (@TheFederman) August 14, 2023

today a @Cruise vehicle passed me – on a bike – with about 1ft of space, violating CA Vehicle Code 21760.

– MayUseFullLane (@MayUseFullLane) August 14, 2023

*Bricked @Cruise in the crosswalk on 4th St.
pic.twitter.com/939CQbenSx*

– Andy (@Shenanigans_ATL) August 14, 2023

Some individuals, on the other hand, have welcomed human-less cars. When Cruise co-founder and CEO, Kyle Vogt posted on X following the CPUC approval for Cruise to operate 24/7 in San Francisco, some users responded by saying, “Finally” and “Love seeing your cars around. Looking forward to riding.”

Love seeing your cars around. Looking forward to riding.

– Pedro | Break into Tech Sales ? (@PedroCastenada) August 11, 2023

Victory for safer streets! ??

– ian ?? (@IanRountree) August 11, 2023

Meanwhile, local officials still have reservations.

The President of San Francisco’s Board of Supervisors, Aaron Peskin, expressed concerns to KPIX-TV, suggesting that Cruise should halt its operations temporarily to refine its

technology.

“They’re deploying hundreds of cars on our streets. They should take a timeout and a pause, until they perfect this technology,” Peskin told the outlet.

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Text messages between Peskin and a Cruise government affairs manager, reviewed by the *San Francisco Chronicle*, reveal that the two discussed how cell connectivity issues hindered the company’s ability to reroute connected cars, resulting in about 10 vehicles being stalled at an intersection. Peskin told the outlet that Cruise is now considering establishing a dedicated cellular network for San Francisco operations.

Despite the state’s approval of autonomous vehicles, local authorities have expressed their reservations. Transportation and fire officials have voiced concerns to state regulators that the robotaxis have led to disruptive incidents such as unanticipated halts and erratic driving, *The Chronicle* reported, and that these occurrences are likely to become even more frequent as companies expand their services.

According to the San Francisco Fire Department, there have been 55 incidents in 2023, up until last week, where driverless vehicles interfered with their emergency operations, per CNN.

<https://www.entrepreneur.com/business-news/self-driving-robotaxi-cars-trigger-traffic-jam-spark-outcry/457485>