

Uber will start audio-recording rides as a safety measure



Uber will launch a feature to audio-record rides in the United States as a way to ensure passenger and driver safety, according to company communications accessed by *The Washington Post* and confirmed by Uber itself. The company says it plans to test the feature in Mexico and Brazil next month before deciding when to bring it to the US.

Drivers can set up the feature to automatically record all rides, while passengers will have to activate the feature through the app's Safety Toolkit before getting into a car; it's not clear whether they'll have to enable the feature before each and every ride. Either way, riders and passengers won't be notified when recording starts – Uber says they'll get a general warning when the feature becomes available, as well as prompts asking them to grant the app microphone access.

Riders can choose to submit the recording to Uber's customer

support team when they report a safety issue. The recordings are saved in case a user decides to report the incident later.

Riders and drivers won't be able to access the audio themselves

The recordings will be encrypted and riders and drivers won't be able to access the audio themselves, but *Reuters* reported earlier this month that the initial rollout of this feature in Mexico and Brazil may make those recordings available to law enforcement officials upon request.

The feature may raise some privacy issues: several states have wiretapping statutes that prohibit recording people without consent from both parties to a conversation. This is further complicated when multiple passengers are involved. Uber says it is still working out these issues.

Uber has been faced with ongoing concerns about user safety, namely, its history of sexual assault cases. At least 103 Uber drivers have been accused of sexually assaulting or harassing their passengers, CNN reported last year, and at least 31 drivers have been convicted for crimes including forcible touching, false imprisonment and rape.

Since then, Uber has been taking steps to improve safety within its app, such as allowing passengers to dial 911 directly from the app and announcing a feature that allows riders to report safety issues during the ride. A year ago, Uber announced it would be releasing a transparency report this year containing data about sexual assaults, but the report hasn't been released yet.

Uber has also had several cases of sexual harassment within its company. Former Uber engineer Susan Fowler wrote a viral account of sexism and harassment at the company. The ensuing investigation into sexual harassment at Uber led to the firing of 20 employees.

The rideshare company used to have a policy of mandatory

arbitration for cases of sexual assault and harassment, but ended it last year.

<https://www.theverge.com/2019/11/20/20974814/uber-audio-recording-rides-safety-rideshare-lyft>