Waymo gets green light for airport service in San Francisco

Waymo is now permitted to test its robotaxi service at San Francisco International Airport (SFO), a big win for the company as it seeks to expand its service area and tackle more popular, revenue-generating destinations.

After years of back-and-forth negotiations, Waymo signed "Testing and Operations Pilot Permit" with SFO, San Francisco Mayor Daniel Lurie said in a release. Under the agreement, Waymo will roll out its service to SFO in three phases, including testing vehicles with a human driver, testing without a driver, and eventually beginning commercial service.

Waymo will start its tests with employees before eventually inviting members of the public to take trips to and from the airport. Pickups and dropoffs will initially take place at SFO's Kiss & Fly lot, which is accessible to the terminals via the AirTrain.

Waymo operates in five cities, but currently only serves one airport: Phoenix's Sky Harbor. The company has been locked in negotiations with SFO for several years as it seeks to assure regulators that its vehicles can handle their chaotic environments, with thousands of cars, taxis, shuttles, and passengers constantly intermixing everyday.

But airports represent a huge money-making opportunity for robotaxis, with airport trips accounting for an estimated 20 percent of human-driven ridehail car trips. Waymo will need airport access if it hopes to eventually compete with Uber and

Lyft — to say nothing of earning enough money to make a profit.

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