Waymo’s self-driving trucks will start delivering freight in Atlanta

Waymo is expanding the scope of its self-driving experiments, announcing Friday that its autonomous trucks would soon begin delivering freight for Google’s data centers in Atlanta. The trucks won’t be completely driverless, but will be operating on public roads during the pilot, the company said.

Waymo is teaming up with sister company Google’s logistics team to “develop our technology and integrate it into the operations of shippers and carriers, with their network of factories, distribution centers, ports and terminals.” As one of the biggest logistics hubs in the country, Atlanta is “the perfect environment” for this type of test, the company said.

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Waymo first began testing its autonomous technology on Class-8 tractor trailers last year in California and Arizona. In January, the company brought some of its self-driving minivans to Atlanta for mapping and public testing. Google’s data centers have been located in the Atlanta region since 2003, so the idea to move into a new phase of testing involving the company’s trucks seemed like an organic next step.

Waymo’s trucks use the same suite of custom-built sensors that power the company’s self-driving minivans. They also use the same self-driving software that has enabled Waymo’s passenger

cars to go fully driverless in Arizona. Waymo plans to launch a fully driverless ride-hail pilot in Phoenix sometime in 2018.

Waymo’s announcement follows on the heels of a similar effort by the company’s arch-rival Uber. Earlier this week, the ride-hail giant announced that its fleet of self-driving trucks was making deliveries in Arizona. Uber said it is using a transfer hub model, in which the trucks drive autonomously on the highway and human drivers take over for the last miles.

Waymo is limiting its deliveries
Unlike Uber, though, Waymo is limiting its deliveries to within its own corporate circle. The self-driving company has yet to express an interest in brokering deliveries between shippers and receivers like Uber has with its Uber Freight venture. In February, Waymo and Uber settled a contentious lawsuit over allegations that Uber had stolen Waymo’s self-driving secrets. The lawsuit centered around Uber’s acquisition of the self-driving truck startup Otto.

Waymo also isn’t the only company using self-driving trucks to haul cargo. A company called Embark has been shipping refrigerators between Southern California and Texas since late 2017. The startup just completed a coast-to-coast trip from LA to Jacksonville, Florida, driving 2,400 miles autonomously. Seattle-based truck technology company Convoy has raised $62 million for its app that matches trucking companies with shippers that need to move freight.

https://www.theverge.com/2018/3/9/17100518/waymo-self-driving-truck-google-atlanta