

Google self-driving car unit spins off as Waymo

WASHINGTON: Google's self-driving car unit is being spun off and rebranded as Waymo as it aims "to make it safe and easy for people and things to move around."



Waymo logo

The company announced on Tuesday that Waymo would become an independent operating unit within Google's parent holding company Alphabet as it seeks to move forward on autonomous driving technology.

"We believe that this technology can begin to reshape some of the ten trillion miles that motor vehicles travel around the world every year, with safer, more efficient and more accessible forms of transport," said John Krafcik, the former Hyundai North America executive who is chief executive of Waymo.

"We can see our technology being useful in personal vehicles, ridesharing, logistics, or solving last mile problems for public transport," he said. "In the long term, self-driving technology could be useful in ways the world has yet to imagine, creating many new types of products, jobs, and services."

Krafcik said Waymo "stands for a new way forward in mobility," adding that "we're a self-driving technology company with a mission to make it safe and easy for people and things to move around."

To demonstrate its technology, the company said it used one of its vehicles to transport Austin, Texas, resident Steve Mahan, who is legally blind. "This ride was possible because our cars can now handle the most difficult driving tasks, such as detecting and responding to emergency vehicles, mastering multi-lane four-way stops, and anticipating what unpredictable humans will do on the road," a statement said.

Google has been working on autonomous driving since 2009, and recently moved this unit into its Google X division which has included projects such as internet delivery by drone and package delivery. The new reorganisation creates a separate unit for the automotive operations.

A fact sheet from the company said Waymo's next steps "will be to let people use fully self-driving cars to do everyday things like run errands or commute to work."

The company declined to comment on a report in *The Information* that said it was scrapping plans for its own branded vehicles to focus on partnerships with auto manufacturers.

A separate report by *Bloomberg* said Waymo would be partnering with Fiat-Chrysler Automobiles in a new ridesharing venture to launch next year. Such a plan would put the tech giant in competition with Uber, into which Google's venture capital fund has an equity stake.

Source: AFP

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