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CASE STUDY · MARLUC SYNOPSIS

Baidu Apollo Go driverless ride-hailing

IMPLEMENTED 2022–2026 · TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS · CHINA · BAND C · CLAIMED ONLY

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Baidu runs Apollo Go, a driverless ride-hailing service in Chinese cities and abroad. By Baidu's account it delivered 3.2 million fully driverless rides in Q1 2026 and about 1 million in Q2, after a March 2026 outage stalled at least 100 vehicles in Wuhan and some cities paused operations for regulatory reasons. All ride and safety figures are Baidu's own.

ABOUT THIS SYNOPSIS

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Facts and figures are as reported by the sources listed below, which may be incomplete, self-reported or out of date. Check the original source before relying on any figure.

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NOTICE WORDING LAST UPDATED 16 NOVEMBER 2026

AT A GLANCE

Frontier case: AI used for a scientific, medical or engineering breakthrough. MarLuc grades what has changed in practice so far.

AI and automation used: Autonomous driving system running a fully driverless ride-hailing service; the sources opened do not describe how the system works.

Implemented: 2022–2026. Grade: band C, Process change, Claimed only.

Headline result, as reported: Baidu reports 3.2 million fully driverless rides in Q1 2026 and about 1 million in Q2, when rides were affected by regulatory-driven pauses in some Chinese cities after a Wuhan fleet outage

1 · The case

The facts, as reported by the 7 sources listed at the end. Where a source is silent, the field says "Not reported".

Organisation

Baidu, Inc. (Apollo Go). Baidu is a Chinese technology company listed in the US and Hong Kong. Apollo Go is its autonomous ride-hailing business, operating fully driverless vehicles in Chinese cities and expanding abroad. Canvas block: 4. Operations and process. Also 3. Customers and proposition.

Business challenge

The challenge. Per Reuters (August 2024), Apollo Go planned to deploy 1,000 vehicles in Wuhan by the end of that year and to operate in 100 cities by 2030. Reuters cited a Haitong International Securities estimate that Apollo Go lost almost $11,000 a car annually in Wuhan, against about $15,000 a ride-hailing car earns in total for driver and platform.

How it was addressed. Baidu runs a fully driverless ride-hailing service. By its account, Apollo Go delivered 3.2 million fully driverless operational rides in Q1 2026 and had reached 28 cities with over 350 million autonomous kilometres by August 2026. In Q2 2026 Baidu reported about 1 million rides and said that rides were temporarily affected by operational adjustments in certain domestic cities due to regulatory considerations. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7]

Who implemented it

In-house (In-house): Operates the Apollo Go driverless ride-hailing service..
Baidu names Uber, Lyft and PostBus as partners for overseas testing and service; these are not part of the Chinese deployment assessed here.

Technology (SEAM pillar E)

SEAM types: T9 AI in physical systems. Deployment: Not reported. Vendors and products: Apollo Go.

Where it was built in: A fully driverless ride-hailing service operated by Baidu in Chinese cities and abroad, booked through the Apollo Go app and, in Dubai, also the Uber app. The sources opened do not describe the model, remote oversight or hosting arrangements.

What changed

Before: ride-hailing in Wuhan relied on human drivers, and Reuters reported in 2024 that drivers there voiced concern about job loss. After, by Baidu's account: a fleet of fully driverless vehicles provides rides at the scale of millions a quarter. The sources opened do not report how many driver or operations roles changed. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7]

What it cost

Not reported for 2026. Reuters (2024) cited a Haitong International Securities estimate of an annual loss of almost $11,000 a car in Wuhan.

What it saved

Not reported [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7]

Governance and control

Wuhan police attributed the March 2026 outage to a system failure and said the cause was under investigation. Baidu says some domestic cities saw regulatory-driven operational adjustments in Q2 2026 and that operations began to resume in August. Bloomberg, relayed by The Next Web, reports a three-month freeze on new robotaxi permits. Baidu has not been quoted in the sources opened explaining the cause of the outage.

S2 · Accountable owner · Claimed
Reuters (2024) names Chen Zhuo as Apollo Go's general manager; no accountable executive for safety is named in the sources opened. [4]

A1 · Safe use · Claimed
Baidu says that during Q2 2026 it conducted a systematic review to strengthen the robustness of its autonomous driving systems and the rigour of its operational processes. [2]

A2 · Human in the loop · Not reported
Not reported. The service is fully driverless; remote oversight arrangements are not described in the sources opened.

A3 · Monitoring and assurance · Claimed
Baidu reports fleet safety statistics each quarter (about one airbag deployment per 14.4 million kilometres to the end of June 2026); no independent check of them is reported. [2]

A4 · Vendor AI · Not reported
Not reported.

A5 · Agent controls · Not reported
No agents described.

A6 · Standards and regulation · Outside scrutiny (a regulator, court, auditor or similar body acted)
Wuhan police attributed the March 2026 outage to a system failure and said the cause was under investigation; Baidu says rides were affected by regulatory-driven operational adjustments in some cities; Bloomberg, relayed by The Next Web, reports a three-month freeze on new robotaxi permits. [3] [2] [5]

What worked, what did not, what is unproven

WORKED

– By Baidu's account, quarterly fully driverless rides reached 3.2 million in Q1 2026, with a weekly peak over 350,000 in March.

– Baidu reports over 240 million fully driverless kilometres and about one airbag deployment per 14.4 million kilometres to the end of June 2026.

– Police said passengers were able to exit the stalled vehicles safely and there were no injuries in the Wuhan outage.

DID NOT

– At least 100 Apollo Go vehicles stopped in the middle of Wuhan roads in March 2026; some passengers were reported trapped for nearly two hours.

– By Baidu's account, Q2 2026 rides fell to about 1 million from 3.2 million in Q1, with regulatory-driven operational adjustments in some domestic cities given as the reason.

– In August 2025 an Apollo Go car carrying a passenger fell into a construction pit in Chongqing, per Reuters; no injuries were reported.

UNPROVEN

– The cause of the Wuhan outage: police said the investigation was continuing, and no final finding is in the sources opened.

– Whether Baidu's safety statistics hold under independent review: they are company figures.

– Unit economics in 2026 and the effect on driver employment: Not reported.

Timeline

Jul 2024 Reuters reports robotaxi job loss rising to the top of Chinese social media searches, with Wuhan drivers voicing concern [4]

Aug 2025 An Apollo Go robotaxi carrying a passenger falls into a construction pit in Chongqing; no injury reported [3]

Mar 2026 Weekly fully driverless rides peak at over 350,000; later in the month a system failure stalls at least 100 Apollo Go vehicles in Wuhan, with no injuries per police [1]

Aug 2026 Baidu reports about 1 million fully driverless rides in Q2, says rides were temporarily affected by regulatory-driven operational adjustments in some cities, and says operations in those cities have begun to resume [2]

2 · Grade and SEAM assessment

MarLuc's opinion, made on the evidence above. How cases are graded: marluc.co.uk/case-studies/how-we-rate

Level of change and impact

Claimed: Not applicable. Grade: C, Process change. Proof: Claimed only. Level of change: Process change.

Process change (Level 2, band C). A ride-hailing process runs without a driver and is reported at the scale of millions of rides a quarter, but every figure is the company's own, ride volume fell in Q2 2026, and no change in roles or cost base is reported. Compare the separate Waymo synopsis, which has regulator and safety data in the sources opened.

The SEAM view and lessons learnt

This is a live, large-scale autonomous service whose results come almost entirely from the operator. The Wuhan outage shows the risk of a fleet that fails together: one system fault stopped at least 100 vehicles at once. Regulators responded, and Baidu says its Q2 rides were reduced as a result of regulatory-driven adjustments, though it does not tie them to the outage. For a larger organisation, the transferable point is that a service run centrally by one system needs a tested way to bring every vehicle or process to a safe stop, and a record of why it paused.

1. Plan for the whole fleet or process failing at once, not one unit.
2. Publish the cause of a major outage and the fix.
3. Report rides, safety and pauses on the same basis each quarter.

Evidence

Score 2 of 4. Mixed: ride and safety figures are Baidu's own; the outage rests on a police statement relayed by Reuters; the permit freeze rests on Bloomberg reporting relayed by The Next Web.

Evaluation method. Company results releases and earnings call plus press reporting (Reuters, Bloomberg via The Next Web). No independent evaluation or regulator report was found in the sources opened.

Sources disagree. Reuters reports the outage on the evening of Tuesday 31 March 2026 (police statement on 1 April); The Next Web, relaying Bloomberg, places it only 'in April'. Baidu's Q2 call attributes lower rides to regulatory considerations in certain cities and does not name the Wuhan outage; the link between the outage, the permit freeze and Baidu's pauses comes from Bloomberg via The Next Web and is not stated by Baidu.

3 · Original sources

Read these in full. To challenge a fact or a grade, use the contact form at marluc.co.uk or the link on https://marluc.co.uk/case-studies/baidu-apollo-go-driverless-ride-hailing

[1] Baidu via PR Newswire Asia: Baidu Announces First Quarter 2026 Results
https://en.prnasia.com/releases/global/baidu-announces-first-quarter-2026-results-533381.shtml

[2] Webull: Baidu (BIDU) Q2 2026 Earnings Call Transcript
https://www.webull.com/news/15426688205497344

[3] Reuters via The Standard: Baidu robotaxi outage in Wuhan caused by 'system failure', police say
https://www.thestandard.com.hk/china/article/328279/Baidu-robotaxi-outage-in-wuhan-caused-by-system-failure-police-say

[4] Reuters via Khaleej Times: China's drivers fret as robotaxis pick up pace - and passengers
https://www.khaleejtimes.com/business-technology-review/chinas-drivers-fret-as-robotaxis-pick-up-pace-and-passengers

[5] The Next Web: Baidu's revenue falls for a fifth quarter as ads keep sliding
https://thenextweb.com/news/baidu-q2-2026-earnings-revenue-fifth-drop-ai-cloud

[6] Baidu Apollo: Apollo Automotive Robot, sixth-generation robotaxi safety architecture
https://www.apollo.auto/en/robotaxi

[7] Stanford Center for Internet and Society: Comparing robotaxis: Baidu's Apollo and Alphabet's Waymo (May 2025)
https://cyberlaw.stanford.edu/blog/2025/05/comparing-robotaxis-baidus-apollo-and-alphabets-waymo/

Baidu, Inc. (Apollo Go) website: https://www.apollo.auto

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VERSION HISTORY

v1.1 25 November 2026 Method update: technology type set to T9 (AI in physical systems) and controls re-checked against sources; structural controls recorded from Baidu's own account and Stanford CIS reporting.
v1.0 15 November 2026 First published