Waymo robotaxi service

IMPLEMENTED 2025–2026 · TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS · US · BAND B · PARTLY PROVED
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Waymo runs a paid driverless ride-hailing service in US cities. By its own account it provided 15 million rides in 2025 and passed 500,000 a week in 2026. Its safety record is published mostly by Waymo itself, with a reinsurer-co-authored claims study and some independent analyses, alongside software recalls and federal investigations.

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Facts and figures are as reported by the sources listed below, which may be incomplete, self-reported or out of date.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. The transformation is potential and unproven; MarLuc grades what has changed in practice so far.

AI-native company: built around AI from the start and attempting transformational change. It claims band A; MarLuc grades it on what is evidenced.

AI used: Autonomous driving system (the Waymo Driver) running a paid ride-hailing service without a human driver.

Implemented: 2025–2026. Grade: band B, Operating model redesign, Partly proved.

Headline result, as reported: More than 500,000 fully autonomous rides a week in 11 US cities by April 2026, per Alphabet; crash data mostly company-authored

1 · The case

The facts, as reported by the 11 sources listed at the end. Where a source is silent, the field says "Not reported".

Organisation

Waymo (Alphabet). Autonomous ride-hailing company, a subsidiary of Alphabet. Operates fully driverless paid rides in US cities including Phoenix, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Austin and Atlanta, with plans for more US cities and international launches in 2026. Canvas block: 1. Strategy and business model. Also 4. Operations and process, 8. Governance and risk.

Business challenge

The challenge. Waymo states its mission as being the world's most trusted driver, and in February 2026 described its growth as built on a safety record it called statistically superior to human driving.

How it was addressed. Waymo operates the Waymo Driver, an autonomous driving system, in a ride-hailing service with no human driver in the vehicle. In February 2026 it raised a $16 billion investment round valuing the company at $126 billion post-money and said it was laying the groundwork for ride-hailing in over 20 additional cities in 2026, including Tokyo and London. By Alphabet's April 2026 report it had passed 500,000 fully autonomous rides a week in 11 major US cities. In August 2026 the California Public Utilities Commission approved Waymo's filing to charge for driverless rides across 18 counties, including new markets in Sacramento and San Diego, per Electrek. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8] [9] [10] [11]

Who implemented it

In-house (In-house): Developed and operates the Waymo Driver and the ride-hailing service.. In-house (In-house): Alphabet: Parent company and investor; reports Waymo results..

Technology (SEAM pillar E)

SEAM types: T9 AI in physical systems. Deployment: Not reported. Vendors and products: Waymo Driver, Waymo One ride-hailing service.

Where it was built in: Built into Waymo's own autonomous vehicles and ride-hailing service; Waymo also offers rides through Uber in Austin and Atlanta (per Bloomberg).

What changed

By its own account, hundreds of thousands of paid driverless rides a week across several US cities, with regulators approving wider operation. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8] [9] [10] [11]

What it cost

Not reported. Waymo raised a $16 billion investment round in February 2026 at a $126 billion post-money valuation. Profitability: Not reported.

What it saved

Not reported. Waymo reports safety outcomes rather than cost savings: 90% fewer serious injury crashes over 127 million rider-only miles (February 2026), and 95% fewer serious injury or worse crashes on its safety hub through June 2026 (55 fewer than the human benchmark over the same distance), by Waymo's account. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8] [9] [10] [11]

Governance and control

Regulators act on Waymo's operations: California authorities license driverless service, the CPUC approved expansion in August 2026, and NHTSA and the NTSB have opened investigations. Waymo files software recalls and publishes crash data. It states that remote assistance staff do not drive its vehicles. Named accountable owner: the chief safety officer speaks for the company, but the sources do not describe a wider ownership structure.

S2 · Accountable owner · Claimed
Waymo's chief safety officer speaks for the company on safety and recalls; no wider ownership structure is described. [5]

A1 · Safe use · Evidenced
California's CPUC reviewed Waymo's expansion filing, suspending it for further review before approving it in August 2026. [9]

A2 · Human in the loop · Claimed
Waymo told Senator Markey remote assistance personnel advise vehicles but do not control, steer or drive them; staff are in the US and the Philippines. [8]

A3 · Monitoring and assurance · Evidenced
NHTSA and NTSB investigations and three voluntary recalls show external monitoring; Waymo publishes safety data and a Swiss Re co-authored claims study. [2] [3] [6] [7]

A4 · Vendor AI · Not reported
Not reported.

A5 · Agent controls · Not reported
Not reported.

A6 · Standards and regulation · Outside scrutiny (a regulator, court, auditor or similar body acted)
The CPUC approved paid driverless service across 18 counties in August 2026 after suspending the filing for review, and NHTSA opened investigations into school bus and school zone behaviour. [9] [5] [7]

What worked, what did not, what is unproven

WORKED

– Scale of service: more than 500,000 fully autonomous rides a week and 11 US cities by April 2026, per Alphabet.

– Safety outcomes in published data: Waymo reports 90% fewer serious injury crashes than human drivers over 127 million rider-only miles, and independent analyses cited by NPR (Ars Technica and Understanding AI) support its claim.

– A Swiss Re co-authored analysis of liability claims over 25.3 million miles found 88% fewer property damage claims and 92% fewer bodily injury claims than the human baseline, per the study as reported by Waymo.

– Regulators approved expansion: California's CPUC cleared service across 18 counties in August 2026, per Electrek.

DID NOT

– School buses: after reports of illegal passing in Atlanta and Austin, NHTSA opened an investigation in October 2025 and Waymo filed a voluntary software recall in December 2025. Austin schools documented 19 instances. Waymo said no injuries occurred because of this problem.

– In January 2026 a Waymo vehicle struck a child near a school in Santa Monica, with minor injuries per Waymo; NHTSA opened an investigation. Waymo said the vehicle braked from about 17 to under 6 miles per hour before the collision.

– Further voluntary recalls: one in May 2026 after robotaxis drove into flooded zones, and one for almost 3,900 vehicles in June 2026 after some drove into freeway construction zones. Waymo restricted freeway operations while it made improvements, per CNBC.

– Remote assistance drew questions from Congress. Waymo said staff in Arizona, Michigan and the Philippines advise vehicles but do not drive them.

– Whether safety results hold across all conditions and at far greater scale. Most crash studies are by Waymo authors, use human benchmarks for the same areas, and cover limited cities.

– Whether Waymo reaches its stated target of more than 1 million paid rides a week by the end of 2026. Not reported as met in the sources checked.

– Whether the service is profitable. Not reported.

Timeline

Oct 2024 Peer-reviewed Waymo crash study accepted for Traffic Injury Prevention (7.14 million miles) [4]

Dec 2024 Waymo and Swiss Re publish a liability claims study over 25.3 million miles [2]

Oct 2025 NHTSA opens an investigation into Waymo vehicles near stopped school buses [5]

Dec 2025 Waymo files a voluntary software recall over school bus behaviour [5]

Jan 2026 NHTSA opens an investigation after a Waymo vehicle strikes a child near a school in Santa Monica [7]

Feb 2026 Waymo raises $16 billion and reports 15 million rides in 2025 and more than 400,000 a week [1]

Feb 2026 Waymo tells Congress remote assistance staff do not drive its vehicles [8]

Apr 2026 Alphabet reports more than 500,000 fully autonomous rides a week in 11 US cities [10]

May 2026 Waymo files a voluntary recall after robotaxis drove into flooded zones [6]

Jun 2026 Waymo recalls about 3,900 vehicles over freeway construction zones [6]

Aug 2026 California CPUC approves driverless paid service across 18 counties [9]

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: A. Grade: B, Operating model redesign. Proof: Partly proved. Level of change: Business model.

Business model (Level 4, band B). Claimed as transformational (band A): ride volumes, regulator approval and safety data are strong, but the change is confined to a few US cities and the wider claim is potential and unproven.

Graded B, claimed A. Waymo runs a paid service with no human driver at scale, so the business is built around AI doing the work, and regulators have approved wide expansion. Waymo and Alphabet describe a potential transformation of transport, and that is potential and unproven: weekly rides are still a small share of US trips, ride and crash figures come largely from Waymo, the 1 million weekly rides target for end of 2026 had not been reported as met, and recalls and federal investigations continue. In notes, MarLuc records why A might be argued.

The SEAM view and lessons learnt

The technology did the job it was built for, and regulators allowed it to scale city by city. The difficulty sits at the join between the system and the public road: school buses, flooded roads and construction zones are edge cases that surfaced in service and were handled through recalls and regulator scrutiny. For a larger organisation, the transferable point is to publish safety data with its method, let regulators test it, and treat each recall as part of the control process.

1. Publish safety data with its method and let others test it.
2. Treat regulator inquiries and recalls as routine controls, not exceptions.
3. Expand city by city and check results before widening the service.

Evidence

Score 2 of 4. Partly proved: peer-reviewed paper accepted by Traffic Injury Prevention (7.1 million miles), a Swiss Re co-authored claims study (submitted to a journal at publication) and regulator actions; ride volumes and later safety figures are company claims.

Evaluation method. Company figures, one peer-reviewed paper by Waymo authors, an insurer co-authored claims study, and regulator and press reports of recalls and investigations; no independent audit of ride volumes.

Sources disagree. NPR reports that Waymo says it has 91% fewer serious injury crashes and 92% fewer pedestrian injury crashes in its operating cities; Waymo's February 2026 blog reports a 90% reduction in serious injury crashes over 127 million miles and its safety hub, through June 2026, shows 95%, because the figures were published at different dates and cover different mileage. The Swiss Re study counts liability claims, not all crashes.

Status. Ongoing: service and expansion continue; NHTSA and NTSB investigations were open as of the sources checked, and Waymo restricted freeway operations in June 2026.

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/waymo-robotaxi-service

[1] Waymo: Accelerating our global growth: Waymo raises $16 billion investment round (February 2026)
https://waymo.com/blog/2026/02/waymo-raises-usd16-billion-investment-round/

[2] Waymo: New Swiss Re study: Waymo is safer than even the most advanced human-driven vehicles (December 2024)
https://waymo.com/blog/2024/12/new-swiss-re-study-waymo/

[3] Waymo: Safety Impact hub (data through June 2026)
https://waymo.com/safety/impact/

[4] arXiv: Kusano et al., Comparison of Waymo Rider-Only Crash Data to Human Crash Data (accepted for Traffic Injury Prevention)
https://arxiv.org/abs/2312.12675

[5] NPR: Waymo will recall software after its self-driving cars passed stopped school buses (December 2025)
https://www.npr.org/2025/12/06/nx-s1-5635614/waymo-school-buses-recall

[6] CNBC: Waymo recalls about 3,900 robotaxis after some drove into freeway construction zones (June 2026)
https://www.cnbc.com/2026/06/18/waymo-nhtsa-voluntary-recall-robotaxis-entered-freeway-construction-zones.html

[7] Bloomberg via Claims Journal: Waymo probed after robotaxi struck child near California school (January 2026)
https://www.claimsjournal.com/news/national/2026/01/29/335370.htm

[8] Reuters via The Star: Waymo defends use of remote assistance workers in US robotaxi operations (February 2026)
https://www.thestar.com.my/tech/tech-news/2026/02/18/waymo-defends-use-of-remote-assistance-workers-in-robotaxi-operations

[9] Electrek: Waymo wins California approval to expand robotaxis across 18 counties (August 2026)
https://electrek.co/2026/08/14/waymo-cpuc-approval-california-expansion-18-counties/

[10] Motley Fool: Alphabet Q1 2026 earnings call transcript and results summary (April 2026)
https://www.fool.com/earnings/call-transcripts/2026/04/29/alphabet-googl-q1-2026-earnings-call-transcript/

[11] NHTSA investigation PE24016 record: Waymo Safety Report, as produced to NHTSA
https://static.nhtsa.gov/odi/inv/2024/INRD-PE24016-19622.pdf

Waymo (Alphabet) website: https://waymo.com

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VERSION HISTORY

v1.2 25 November 2026 Method update: technology type updated to T9 (AI in physical systems) and controls re-checked against sources; structural controls recorded from Waymo's safety report in NHTSA's investigation record.
v1.1 15 November 2026 Method update: standards and regulation (A6) relabelled "outside scrutiny" because the evidence is a regulator, court, auditor or similar body acting, not the organisation's own compliance.
v1.0 15 November 2026 First published