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Uber Opening Robotics Research Facility In Pittsburgh To Build Self-Driving Cars

Posted yesterday by [John Biggs \(@johnbiggs\)](#)

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Driver-on-demand service [Uber](#) is building a robotics research lab in Pittsburgh, PA to “kickstart autonomous taxi fleet development,” sources close to the decision have confirmed to TechCrunch. They say the company has hired talent from Carnegie Mellon University’s Robotics Institute, including lead engineering and commercialization experts.

No one at Carnegie Mellon or Uber agreed to discuss the deal on the record but an announcement should be forthcoming. **Update:** Uber published a [blog post today](#) outlining its partnership with Carnegie Mellon University, confirming our reporting.

Sources tell us Uber is hiring more than fifty senior scientists from Carnegie Mellon as well as from the [National Robotics Engineering Center](#), a CMU-affiliated research entity. Carnegie

Mellon, home of the [Mars Rover](#) and other high-profile robotics projects, declined to comment at this time, as did scientists mentioned by our source. Uber has “cleaned out” the Robotics Institute, said the source.

The source also noted that most of these technologies came through a “massive” military spending push over the past decade and should net the university millions in IP licensing fees.

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ed infrastructure at
number of
multi-hundred-
thousand dollar investment in third-party engineering workstations.

In the past, Uber CEO Travis Kalanick has said [he would](#) replace human drivers with self-driving cars. The decision to run the facility in Pittsburgh makes perfect sense, given the proximity to CMU and the potential secrecy afforded by moving research out of Silicon Valley.

In a related story, Bloomberg Business is [reporting that Google](#) is looking into creating an on-demand car service of its own, which is very interesting considering Uber’s interest in automated vehicles. It also raises questions about Google’s David Drummond maintaining a spot on Uber’s board. Google has integrated Uber into its Google Maps products and has taken an investment in Uber via its Google Ventures arm.

No specific plans for a roll-out date or goals for Uber’s automated driving efforts were mentioned. The company recently raised \$4 billion in equity and debt including \$1.6 billion in convertible debt earlier this month. This follows a [\\$1.4 billion Series D funding round](#) over the summer as well as another [\\$1.2 round in December](#). The company is now valued at \$41 billion.

Updated to add reports of Google competing with Uber.

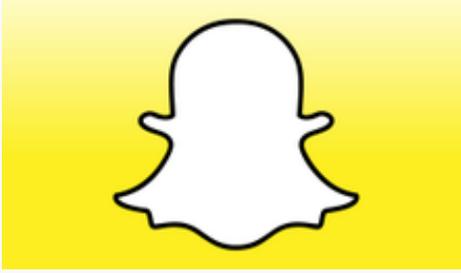
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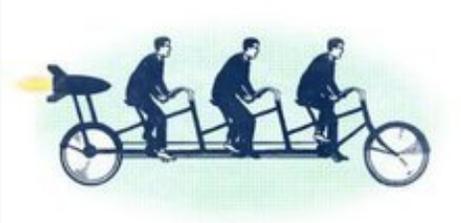
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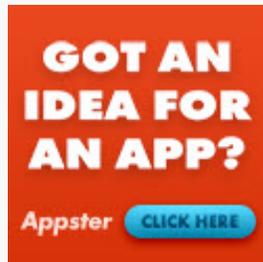
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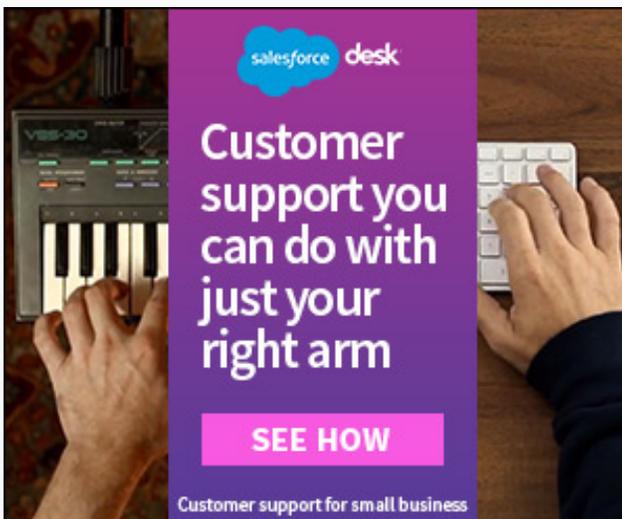
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Shawn Christopher · Follow · Top Commenter · Sr. Application Eng. at Ciber

As someone who works/lives in the Pittsburgh area, this is perfect for self driving. We have hills, curves, one way streets during certain times, and streets that are named the same as stairways that were used during the coal era. Mixed with bridges, pedestrians that don't follow traffic laws, and deer, I can't see how this can go wrong.

Though, I'm more than happy to take Uber's money in my city.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · 9 · [Follow Post](#) · 23 hours ago



Erik Schwartz · Top Commenter · Product BitTorrent TV at BitTorrent Inc.

Uber works because they offload all the downside risk and capex costs on the drivers. Self driving cars make no sense for them.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · 8 · [Follow Post](#) · 23 hours ago



Zach Weisman · Top Commenter · Los Angeles, California

True, but they want to have an answer to Google's Uber Killer. Its like how Netflix transitioned to streaming. They knew early on that mailing DVDs was only a temporary business model. They made / raised money with mailers in order to pivot to streaming.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · 4 · 22 hours ago



Billy Davis · Follow · Top Commenter

I disaagree. Uber thinks that they have transferred the risk but accordina to the state forms and



statutes they still hold it. Note that I am not speculating. Uber is a house of cards considering the personal insurance forms and what they allow as far as commercial use. People pleasing politicians making incorrect pronouncements have no effect on case law. Robots are better than people in this case. I find it humorous the same people supporting it will be kicked out of the process.

Reply · Like · 1 · 22 hours ago



Robert Miller · Top Commenter · University of Massachusetts Amherst

I think keeping 100% of the revenue instead of 20% might cover the increased liability.

Reply · Like · 12 · 22 hours ago

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Khalid Fayeze

This is the type of tech I am totally against. We should never allow technology to take over the jobs that millions of families (especially immigrant families) across the country depend on. A line must be drawn somewhere.

Reply · Like · 4 · Follow Post · Yesterday at 1:39pm



Sean Percival · Follow · Top Commenter · Partner at 500 Startups · 3,912 followers

Yawnnnnn :) We should probably go back to having operators manually switching calls because think of the jobs.

Reply · Like · 61 · Yesterday at 1:44pm



Carlos Herrera · Top Commenter · He's Awesome at Everything

Sean Percival thank you, Sean. I was already thinking of a similar reply but you put it perfectly.

Reply · Like · 5 · Yesterday at 1:51pm



Chris Paul · Top Commenter

this technology can save a lot of lives

Reply · Like · 6 · 23 hours ago

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Nathan Wright · Top Commenter · Works at National Product Sales

That's one way to get legalization of self-driving cars to the front of the political process. Put Uber on it and have them give the finger to government opposition.

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Damian Scavo · Follow · CEO & Founder at GSOUND

I expect ads during the ride to reduce the cost and a Netflix-like monthly fee. I also expect super optimized disposition of the vehicle based on personal data, weather, events, etc... Also a real time satellite/incam video recording of each of them at any time.

They will also delivery goods of course.

Final step in less than 15 years: they will fly using exocopters drone technoly.

By the end, they will be mostly 3dprinted with renovable resources.

This is mathematical evolution and cannot be stopped as cars replaced horses.

Reply · Like · 2 · Follow Post · 14 hours ago



Wayne Martin · Top Commenter

Self-driving vehicles are an inevitability. Uber is showing a tremendous amount of "pluck" to step up to the line and get the ball rolling for the taxi business. Here's wishing them a lot of good luck, and to get good lobbyists in DC--as there will be a lot of resistance from the taxi business that is entrenched, and has some klout in the larger, more corrupt, Eastern cities.

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Sarwat Jamaluddin · Follow · Top Commenter · CEO & Founder at Tlgerbee Labs



Wow, impressive! I thought they were going to work with Google or Tesla for future self driving Uber rides, but I guess they have gotten big enough to afford to build their own self driving tech in house! I would say time is definitely on their side since this wont be available in the wild for at least another 5 years or so. Good call for sure!

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Aaron Clark · [📧 Follow](#) · [★ Top Commenter](#) · Da Boss at Self-Employed · 483 followers

It's going to happen eventually, and it's another giant feather in the robotics cap for Pittsburgh. But DAMMIT, why a company as evil as Uber? Boooooo.

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William Stark · [📧 Follow](#) · Lahser High School

so you come home at 5pm, go to the mall, baseball game, go watch a movie... but YOU click the "For Hire" or "available" on uber app, and your self driving car will answer any "uber ride" requests in the surrounding areas.... then re parks itself before you request it to meet you at your location.... who wouldn't want to have that? Make money with your car instead of it just being parked for 2 hours, overnight? I think uber wants a very thorough understanding on self driving cars...

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · [Follow Post](#) · 6 hours ago



David Shanahan · [★ Top Commenter](#) · Atlanta College of Art

Municipalities will have to deal with sharply declining revenues due to fewer traffic citations. Insurance rates should go down sharply. Once accident data proves the reduced risk, car companies can build significantly lighter vehicles - i.e cheaper and more efficient. @2030 the parking lot reclamation land rush will be picking up steam.

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James Burnham · [★ Top Commenter](#)

I'm also wondering when car manufacturers will be getting rid of the steering column and pedals and go to a joystick type of control. You could drive from either front seat, eliminate a lot of weight, and I'm guessing making the auto safer. I know there has been some movement in this direction but I don't know why it hasn't already been done widespread.

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Gary Lapidus · [★ Top Commenter](#) · London, United Kingdom

This is such early 21st century thinking thinking by Uber. By the time Uber has its driverless car fleet, we will all be living plugged into a virtual reality Matrix, and physical travel will no longer be necessary.

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Kayla Andersen · Recruiting Coordinator, at Primitive Logic

Thanks for this information John. Good to hear Google will have competition in the near future. Competition will help encourage both companies to invest in the best and latest self driving technology.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · [Follow Post](#) · 6 hours ago



Frank Cabanski · [★ Top Commenter](#)

I can't wait to see a self driving police car pull over a self driving car for speeding. "In a hurry, pal? You were going .00037 MPH over the speed limit. This isn't the high speed Internet superhighway."

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Nitin Sharma · UNO

Self Driving Cars with UberPool to create an optimal path car service that categorizes as "public transportation". Brilliant Idea!

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Theric Ford · [★ Top Commenter](#) · Sales at The streets of lasvegas

Here in Nevada, we already have regulations for self driving cars, but Uber is not allowed to do business here.



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Tyrone Stretch Jones · University of Oklahoma

I would cancel using uber if they did that stop with the jobs that eliminates people

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · [Follow Post](#) · 6 hours ago



Ronald Barbour · ★ Top Commenter · Rollins College

This would be the answer to a drunk's prayer! No more DWIs and AAs :-)

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Steve Weston · Eastern Washington University

The answer to a drunk's prayer is all ready here and has always been here, take a taxi, take Uber with a real driver, get a ride with a friend who is not a drinker. There is no excuse for drunk driving now!

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