

# Autonomous Vehicles & First Responders



April 29, 2026



# Autonomous Vehicles in Austin

Cities are still preempted from creating regulations or permits for autonomous vehicles – starting in May 2026 the Texas DMV will permit AVs.

The City has had an AV Safety working group since 2023 that maintains the AV incident dashboard, obtains training for first responders, and facilitates communication with AV companies and other stakeholders.

Texas law does not require first responder trainings but all AV companies currently deployed in Austin have offered some training.

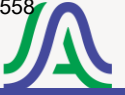


Austin-Bergstrom  
International Airport

# Current AV Operations in Austin

City of Austin  
Special Called Joint Public Safety and Mobility Committees Meeting Backup, April 29, 2025

File ID: 26-1558

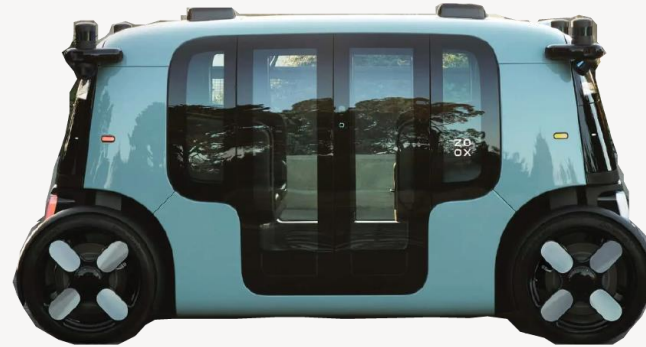


Austin

## Deployed



**Waymo**  
Jaguar i-Pace  
250+



**Zoox**  
Robotaxi  
5



**Tesla**  
Model Y  
~50



**Zoox**  
Toyota Highlander  
~20



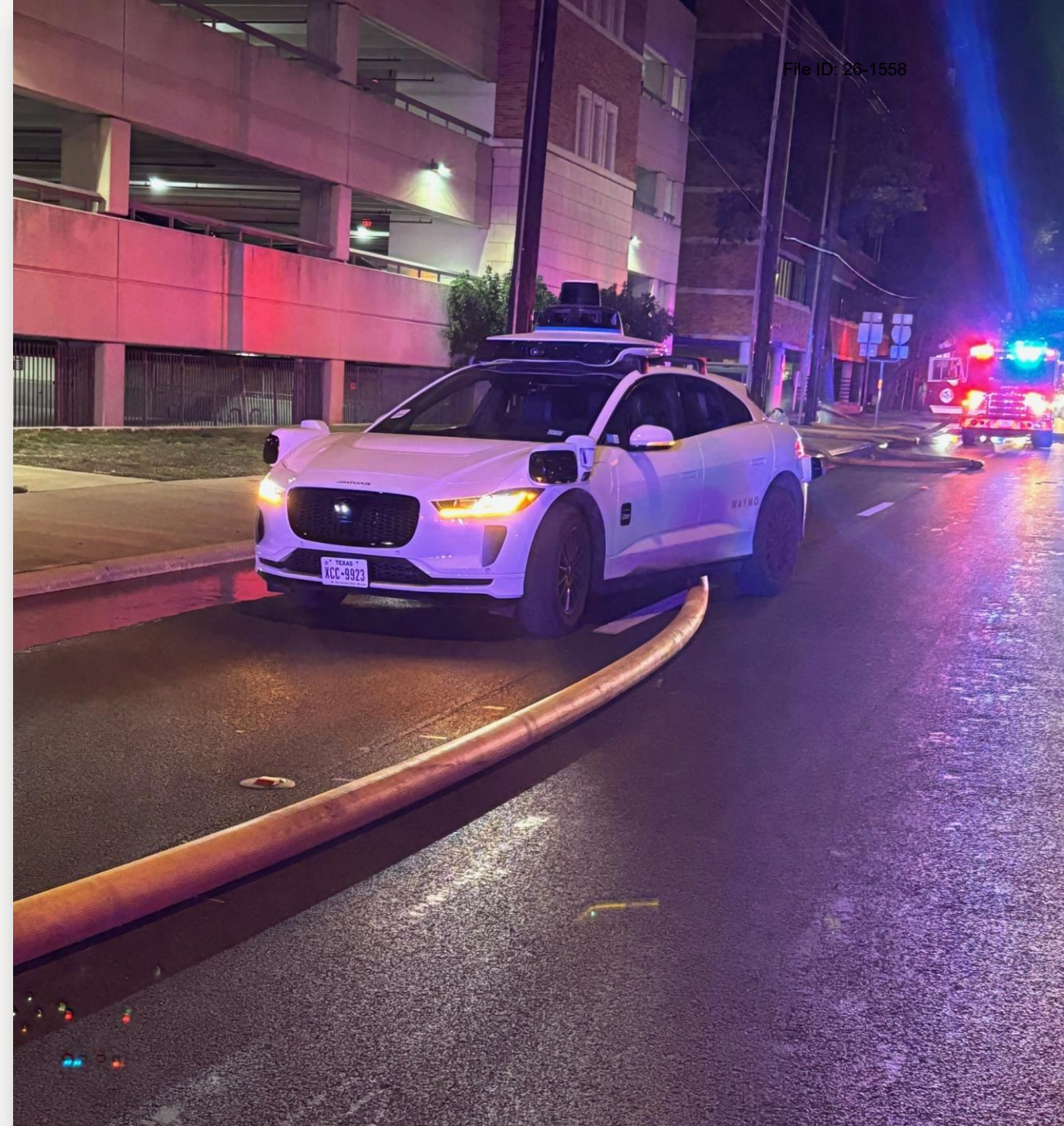
**VW ADMT**  
ID. Buzz  
~12



**Avride**  
Hyundai IONIQ 5  
~50

# Geofencing

- Our expectation – communicated to all AV companies – is 1,000 feet (radius) for one hour.
- We only request this for serious emergencies.
- We do this because AVs don't always behave appropriately around emergency scenes.
- An AV drove over a fire hose at a fire scene on October 5, 2025.



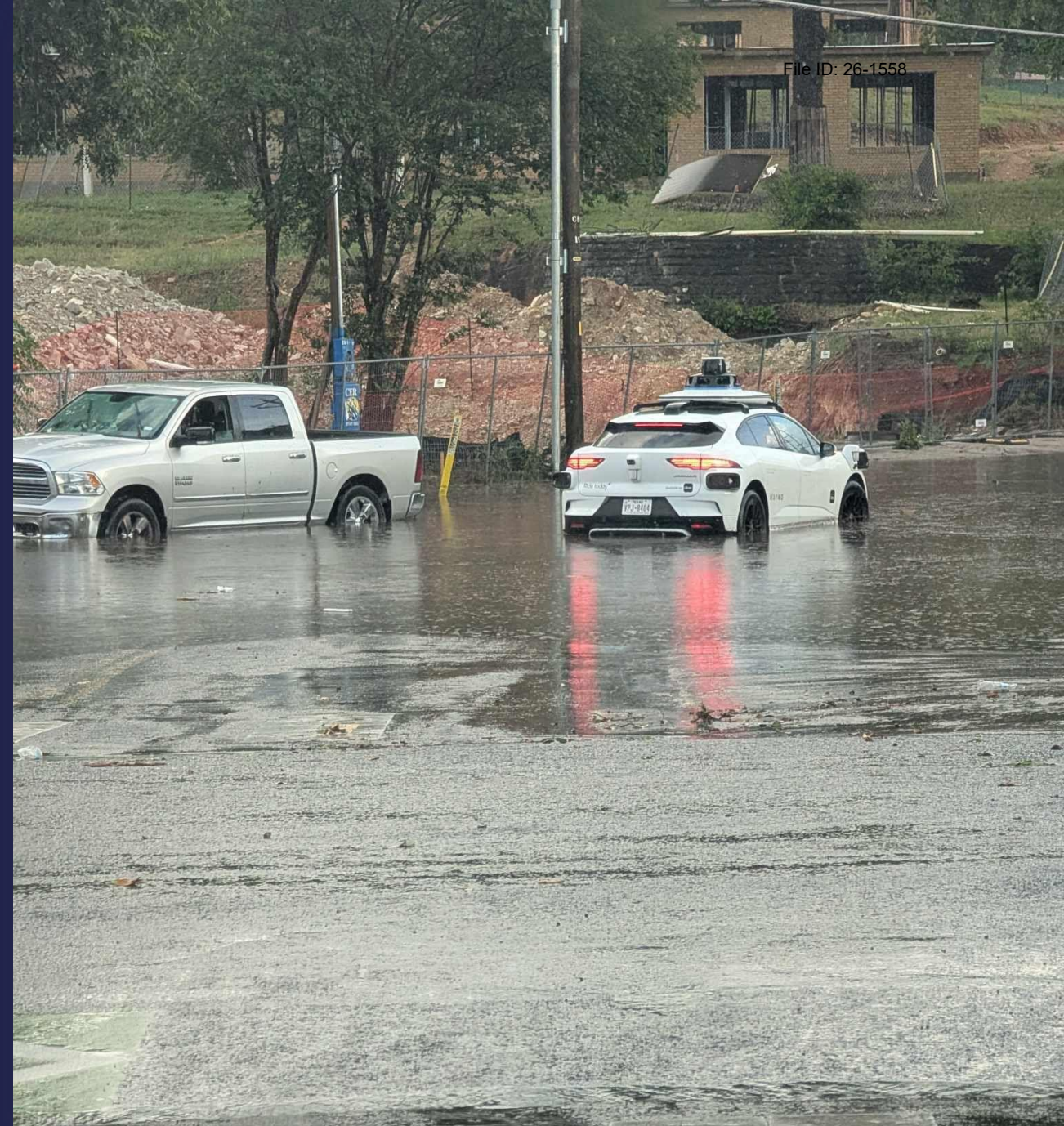
# Feedback Loop



It is important that we communicate issues and understand risks as well as how AV companies are mitigating them.

# Citywide Emergencies

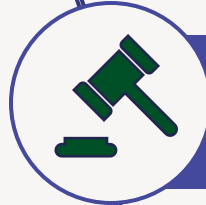
- Good communications practices have been established but could be improved.
- Would recommend AVs do not operate in adverse weather conditions.
- Preference is to not deal with unresponsive AVs while also managing the emergency response.



# AVs & Citations



The City of Austin can cite AVs for moving violations. But not by giving them a ticket.



The officer must swear an affidavit of the incident and file it with the court.



The court then must serve the complaint on the registered agent (in Texas).



The City also cites AVs for parking violations.

# Hand signals issues

- Since July 2023, we've noted that AVs can struggle with human traffic control – especially police on motorcycles.
- AVs can behave inappropriately at special events, at emergency scenes, with motorcades, at construction scenes, during funeral processions, and police escorts.
- AVs typically obey traffic signals instead of hand gestures from first responders.



# Communications issues

It has taken up to 3 minutes to connect with a remote agent.

San Francisco has reported significantly longer wait times to reach a remote agent in the past.

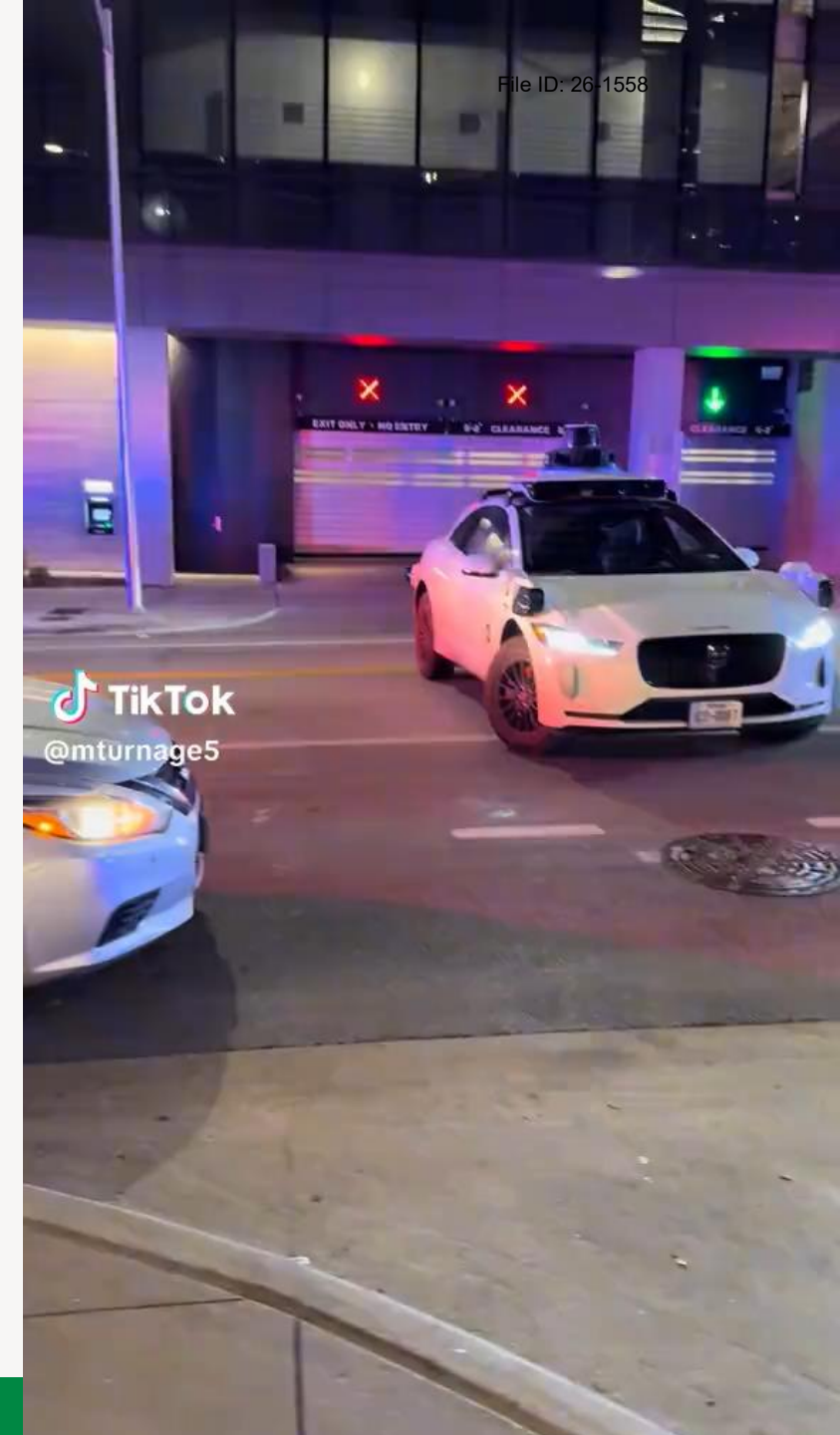
On March 14, 2026, officers knocked on the window of a stalled AV for over two minutes before it came down and they were able to establish communication.



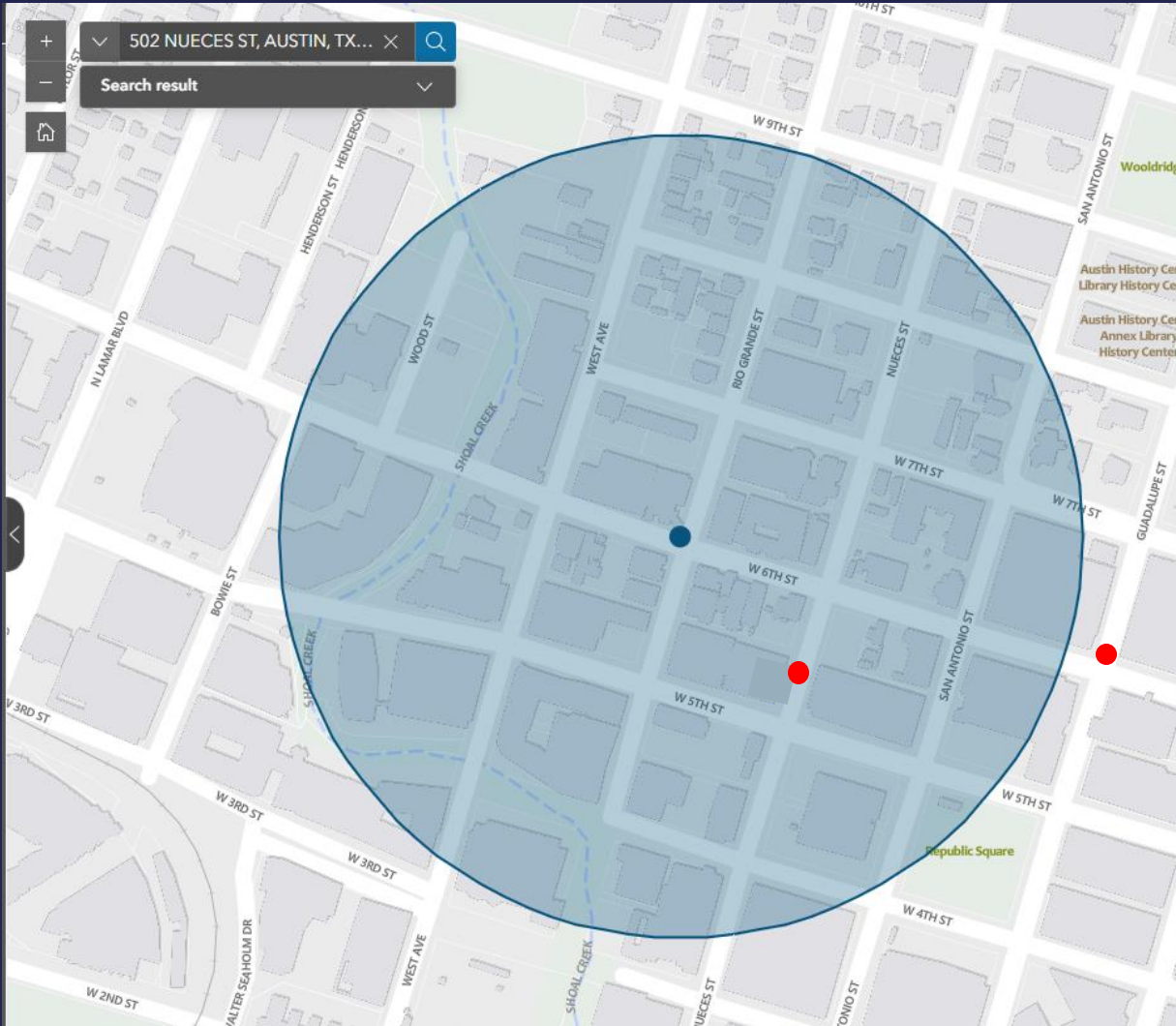
TikTok  
@valeriavasquez

# Timeline of March 1<sup>st</sup> Incident

- 0158: First 911 activation
- 0203: EMS and Fire upgrade to Active Attack
  - AV companies alerted
- ~0211: Waymo blocks ambulance response on Nueces
  - Ambulance diverts response
- 0213: APD Officer successfully takes control and moves the Waymo into an adjacent garage
- 0210 - 0230: Fire reports as many as 5 Waymo AVs blocking a response corridor set up for ambulances
  - (Guadalupe at West 6<sup>th</sup> St.)
- 0234: APD Dispatcher requests a supervisor to notify Waymo to avoid 'ALL OF THE WEST 6<sup>TH</sup> AREA'
- 0239: APD Dispatch confirms Waymo has been notified
  - Waymo states they are Geofencing 6<sup>th</sup>/Lamar to 6<sup>th</sup>/Congress



# Our Expected Geofence – 1000’



The 1000’ geofence expectation was developed in conjunction with SF and Phoenix Fire

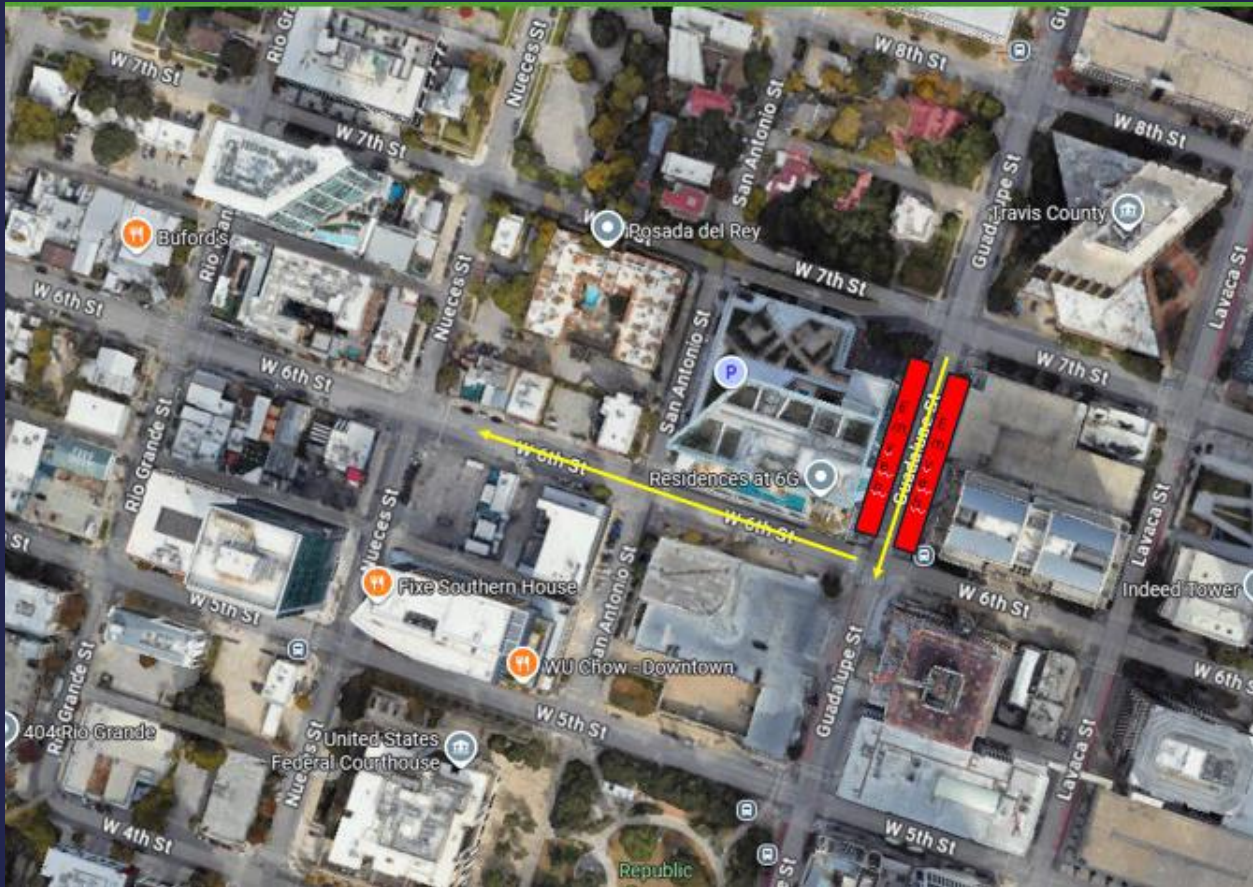
Attempt to standardize the expectation in cities with AVs

This expectation has been repeatedly communicated to all AV companies

Is 1000’ enough?

Blue dot = dispatch address in CAD  
Red dots = approx. locations of Waymo blockages

# Guadalupe blockage



Austin Firefighters established a response corridor on Guadalupe for rapid ingress to the scene.

Firefighters stated that “multiple Waymo vehicles (maybe 5) were heading southbound on Guadalupe and then became confused and stopped at 6th and Guadalupe. Despite efforts to use hand signals, the lead Waymo vehicle would not continue southbound on Guadalupe. This resulted in traffic stacking up on Guadalupe towards 7<sup>th</sup>. Ambulances then began getting caught in this backup. We got on the radio and asked for ambulances to be diverted.”

# 'Sleepers' issue

AV remote support activates 911 when a passenger does not exit the vehicle at their destination.

- No driver to interact, provide information

The passenger may be asleep, unconscious, or experiencing a medical emergency.

- Remote support cannot interact with the passenger
- Cannot tell if the person is breathing
- Often results in Priority 1 response

San Francisco reports 250 'sleeper' calls in 2025 with 2% of passengers needing medical transport.

Similar trend in Austin as AV presence increases – 99 'sleeper' calls in 2025 with 3% of passengers requiring medical transport.



# Peer cities



- We work with other cities' first responders on aligning our procedures and expectations ***to make it easier for AV companies operating in multiple cities.***
- We engage extensively with our peer cities and many of our procedures we developed after talking with staff in San Francisco, Phoenix, and Las Vegas.
- California passed a law that will go into effect July 1, 2026 that requires AV companies to comply with a geofence within two minutes of receiving the request from local first responders.
- Austin was the first city in Texas with AV rideshare – we are in communication with staff in Dallas, Houston, El Paso, and San Antonio to try and align efforts. We have a seat on the Texas Connected & Autonomous Vehicle Task Force.

# Recommendations



- Reiterate City desire that all AV companies geofence a 1,000-foot radius for one hour for serious emergencies.
- Request that AV companies share information about their disaster planning and participate in Citywide emergency planning.
- Hold regular meetings with AV companies on how they are working to improve their systems and updates on what we're doing in Austin.

## *Legislative recommendations*

- Ensure TxDMV has the authority to immediately limit/restrict operations in fatal or serious injury crashes
- Create a digital citations process so AVs can be given moving violations just like drivers
- Increase fees and fines for repeated safety violations
- Explore potential fee for public safety resources dealing with moving vehicles, sleeper issues
- Share data that would be helpful to City mobility planning and first responders



# Thank You

Autonomous Vehicle Safety  
Working Group