## California to give the green light to truly driverless cars

Brother Branham preached about the egg shaped cars and they will be driverless. Here it is the fulfillment in our times.

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The Waymo driverless car is displayed during a Google event, Tuesday, Dec. 13, 2016, in San Francisco. The self-driving car project that Google started seven years ago has grown into a company called Waymo.. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg)

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Cars with no steering wheel, no pedals and nobody at all inside could be driving themselves on California roads by the end of the year, under proposed new state rules that would give a powerful boost to the fast-developing technology.

For the past several years, tech companies and automakers have been testing self-driving cars on the open road in California. But regulators insisted that those vehicles have steering wheels, foot controls and human backup drivers who could take over in an emergency.

On Friday, the state Department of Motor Vehicles proposed regulations that would open the way for truly driverless cars.

Under the rules, road-testing of such vehicles could begin by the end of 2017, and a limited number could become available to customers as early as 2018 — provided the federal government gives the necessary permission.

Currently, federal automobile standards require steering wheels, though Washington has shown a desire to encourage self-driving technology.

While a few other states have permitted such testing, this is a major step forward for the industry, given California's size as the most populous state, its clout as the nation's biggest car market and its longtime role as a cultural trendsetter.

The proposed regulations also amount to the most detailed regulatory framework of any state.

"California has taken a big step. This is exciting," said Bryant Walker Smith, a law professor at the University of South Carolina who tracks government policy on self-driving cars.

The rules are subject to a public hearing and a comment period and could change. Regulators hope to put them in effect by December.

The proposal is more than two years overdue, reflecting complex questions of safety and highly advanced technology.

"We don't want to race to meet a deadline," said Bernard Soriano, a leader of the motor vehicle agency's self-driving program. "We want to get this right."

In one important change from prior drafts, once a manufacturer declares its technology is road-ready, it can put its cars on the market. That self-certification approach mirrors how federal officials regulate standard cars, and represents a big victory for such major players as Waymo, Google's self-driving car project.

Also under the proposed regulations, any driverless car still must be remotely monitored and able to pull itself over safely in an emergency.

A Waymo spokesman had no immediate comment. The chief skeptic of the technology, California-based Consumer Watchdog, said the proposal does not protect the public.

"The new rules are too industry-friendly," Consumer Watchdog's John Simpson said in a statement.

The technology is developing quickly. More than a year ago, a Waymo prototype with no steering wheel or pedals drove a blind man on city streets in Texas.

Supporters say the cars may one day be far safer than those with humans at the

wheel, since the machinery won't drive distracted, drunk or drowsy.

During road-testing in California, self-driving cars with human backup drivers are

believed to have caused just a few collisions.

A year ago, Waymo reported that during the 424,331 miles its cars had driven themselves, a human driver intervened 11 times to avoid a collision. In an update earlier this year, Waymo said its fleet had driven 636,868 miles in autonomous

In all, 27 companies have Department of Motor Vehicles permits to test on California roads.

mode; it did not say how many crashes were avoided.

Waymo was able to legally put its prototype on the road in Texas because state law there does not prohibit a fully driverless car. Other states have explicitly invited the technology onto its roads, including Michigan, whose governor signed a bill in December that allows the public testing of cars with no driver.

In the meantime, the industry has been lobbying the U.S. Transportation Department and Congress for rule changes that could speed the introduction of truly driverless cars.