The Optimus Ride self-driving car. | Photo source Optimus Ride

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FREE, SELF-DRIVING SHUTTLE SERVICE STARTS IN NEW YORK

🇺🇸 MOBILITY & TRANSPORT

Optimus Ride uses geofencing to allow its autonomous vehicles to safely move through areas it has thoroughly mapped

Spotted: Autonomous vehicle company Optimus Ride has launched New York's first self-driving vehicle program. The programme will allow workers at the Brooklyn Navy Yard industrial park to ride for free between the NYC Ferry stop at Dock72 and the Yards' Cumberland Gate at Flushing Ave. The service is expected to carry around 16,000 passengers a month.

The development results from merging expertise from a wide variety of departments at MIT, including autonomous tech, business and urban planning.

The company, a startup out of MIT, uses geofencing to allow its autonomous vehicles to safely move through areas it has thoroughly mapped. The strictly defined areas where the vehicles drive help them learn what the company calls the "culture of driving" on different roads.

Optimus Ride's vehicles use a machine vision system to rapidly identify objects and make predictions. Location-specific details, like the turn radius of buses used in different communities, are learned quickly by the system because it focuses on a defined area, rather than everywhere.

The vehicles still require safety drivers, but the founders hope to soon be monitoring fleets with fewer people in a manner similar to an air traffic controller.

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Takeaway:

For autonomous vehicle developers, public roads are the main goal, but they are not there yet. Geofencing provides an alternative that can be put to use immediately. It is particularly useful in large, defined areas such as industrial estates, residential communities, airports and university campuses. For example, Springwise has spotted an autonomous shuttle bus service for seniors and the use of military radar in self-driving vehicles. With the combined value of transportation services in those markets estimated at more £550 billion, there is clearly room for a wide variety of autonomous vehicle solutions.