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NHTSA opens investigation after Waymo self-driving vehicle strikes child in Santa Monica



By [ZAHRA AWAN](#) – February 3, 2026 ⌚ 3 Mins Read

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"At [Waymo](#), we are committed to improving road safety, both for our riders and all those with whom we share the road. Part of that commitment is being transparent when incidents occur," the company said in a statement. After the collision, the child stood up immediately, walked to the sidewalk and Waymo called 911.

According to the agency, the child ran across the street from behind a double-parked SUV during normal school drop-off hours and was struck by the Alphabet-owned Waymo autonomous vehicle. Other children, a crossing guard and several double-parked vehicles were present in the area.

Waymo explained, "The event occurred when the pedestrian suddenly entered the roadway from behind a tall SUV, moving directly into our vehicle's path. Our technology immediately detected the individual as soon as they began to emerge from behind the stopped vehicle. The Waymo Driver braked hard, reducing speed from approximately 17mph [27km/h] to under 6mph [9.5km/h] before contact was made."

[NHTSA](#) is opening a preliminary evaluation to investigate whether the Waymo AV exercised appropriate caution, given its proximity to the elementary school during drop-off hours and the presence of young pedestrians and other potentially vulnerable road users.

The agency said it plans to examine the vehicle's "intended behavior in school zones and neighboring areas, especially during normal school pickup/drop-off times, including but not limited to its adherence to posted speed limits" and will "also investigate Waymo's post-impact response."

Waymo said a computer model suggested a fully attentive human driver in this same situation would have made contact with the pedestrian at approximately 14mph (22.5km/h).

"The vehicle remained stopped, moved to the side of the road and stayed there until law enforcement cleared the vehicle to leave the scene," Waymo said.

The same day as the incident, the National Transportation Safety Board opened an investigation into Waymo after its robotaxis illegally passed stopped school buses in Austin, Texas, at least 19 times since the start of the school year.

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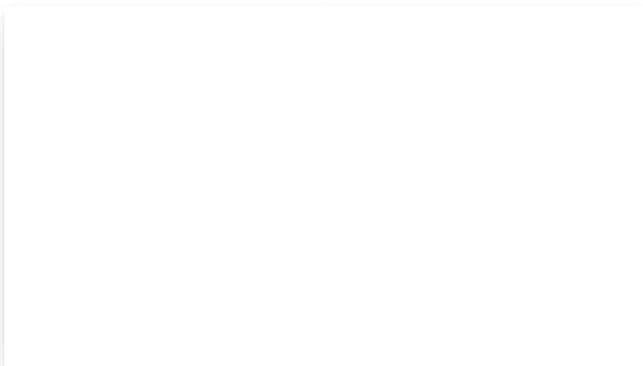
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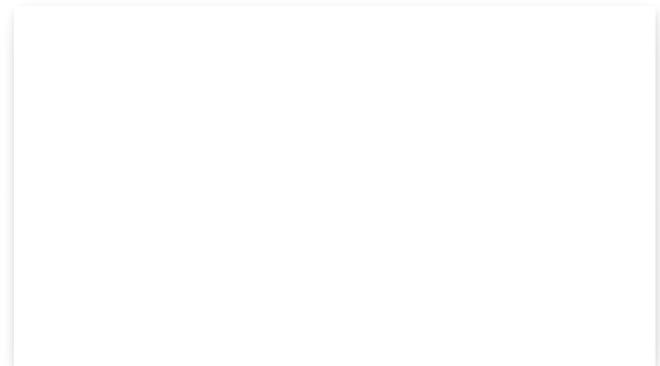
Zahra brings her background in reporting on the heavy manufacturing industry together with her passion for automotive as web editor at UKi Media & Events. She is keen to connect with people across the sector who share her enthusiasm for automotive innovation.

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