

Revamped Uber app adds transit options, passenger safety features

September 26 2019, by Julie Jammot



Uber CEO Dara Khosrowshahi unveiled a new version of its smartphone app at a San Francisco event

Uber on Thursday unveiled a revamped version of its smartphone app that weaves together services from shared rides to public transit

schedules while adding more security features.

The new app is intended to let Uber users see, and ideally tap into the company's array of options for getting around or having meals delivered.

"We want Uber to be the operating system for your everyday life: however you want to move around your city, and whatever you need, we want Uber to be your go-to app," said Uber chief executive Dara Khosrowshahi.

"Uber started with on-demand rides, but we've grown to offer access to everything from food delivery to electric bikes and scooters."

Rides, Eats food delivery and other options are displayed side-by-side in the new application, which Uber said is being tested in hundreds of cities in the US and other countries.

Uber also ramped up security features, adding an option for people awaiting rides to receive four-digit codes they can ask drivers to confirm to be sure the vehicle they are about to get into is indeed the one sent for them by the service.

The new Uber app lets riders report safety issues to the company during their trips, or send a text message to police emergency dispatchers in cities that support the technology.



Uber safety product chief Sachin Kansal addresses the audience during an Uber product launch in San Francisco, discussing the upgraded app's security features

Emergency text messages will be automatically loaded with details such as the model car, license number, and location, according to Khosrowshahi.

Uber said it improved a "real-time ID check" system in the app, adding blinking, smiling and other movements to facial recognition technology designed to make sure the registered Uber driver is indeed the person behind the wheel.

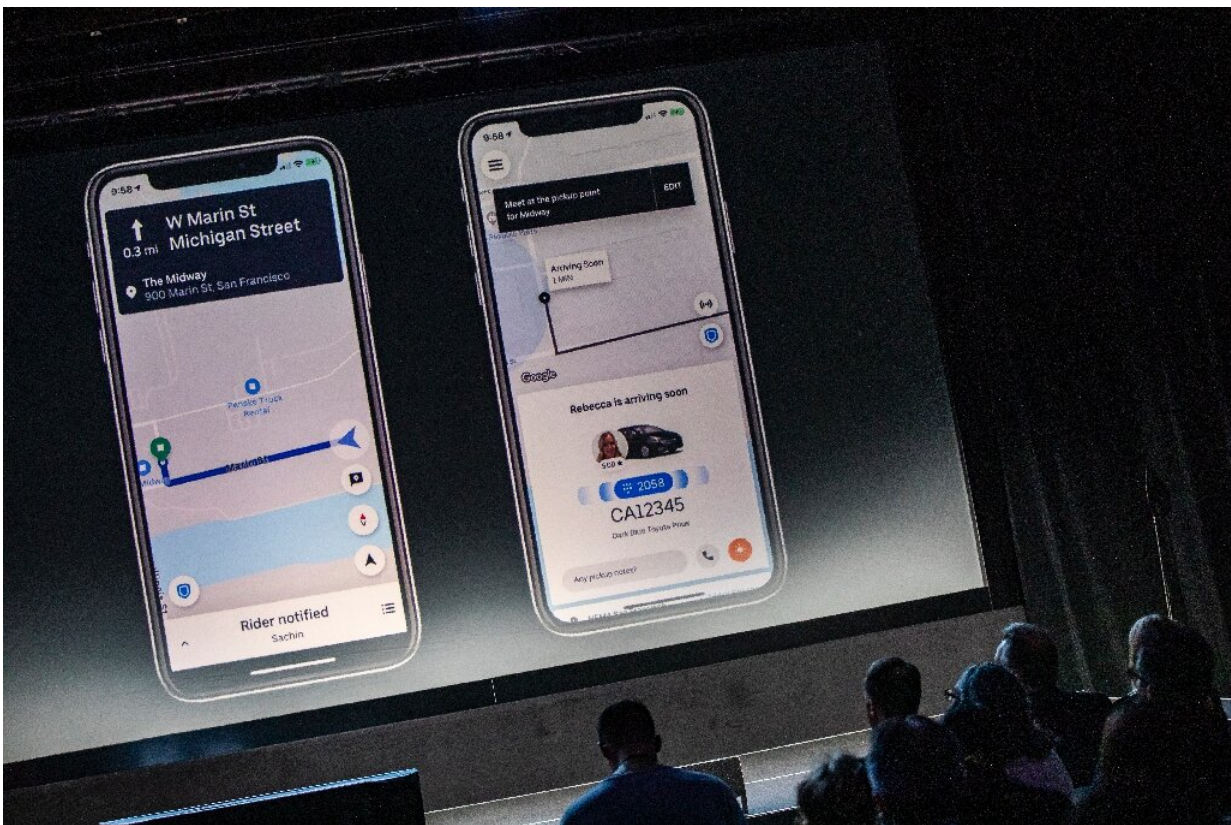
The move comes with rideshare firms under pressure to curb criminal acts including sexual assaults involving drivers and riders.

Road to profit?

Uber's overhauled app should encourage more use but it is unlikely to cure the company's inability to make a profit, Gartner analyst Michael Ramsey told AFP.

Ramsey maintained that Uber may need to do more than promote only its own services on the application.

"What Uber is doing is a move in the right direction, but they need to give up the walled garden and put everyone on their platform," the Gartner analyst said.



A new Uber safety feature is displayed at a San Francisco product launch event

by the ride-hailing giant

"The closed ecosystem of point-to-point transportation is not going to work."

Ramsey said Uber will be forced to put rivals such as Lyft and Lime on its platform, contending Apple or Google could launch services weaving together mobility apps, payments, passwords and more.

"The longer Uber closes the door to being one big app it leaves open a door to weird competitors like Apple or Google," Ramsey said.

Technology analyst Rob Enderle of Enderle Group saw a risk that consolidating Uber offerings in the app might complicate life for users while not providing strong incentive to combine services.

For example, someone hailing a car ride from Uber is more likely to be heading to a restaurant than interested in tapping into Eats food delivery.

Someone looking for a shared electric scooter or bicycle would probably prefer one nearby, no matter the provider, instead of walking a while to use an Uber Jump offering, the analyst reasoned.

"There are very different goals for Uber's different services," Enderle said.

"I don't see the synergy between the offerings because I don't see people moving from one to the other."



Uber said its new mobile app will give people a variety of transport options and services, with improved safety features

Luring drivers

The San Francisco-based company also said it is adding features intended to make it more tempting, and lucrative, to be an Uber driver.

An "earnings estimator" will help drivers better project how much money they can expect to make, while new tools such as a "Demand Heatmap" will highlight areas where more people are seeking rides.

The move comes after California enacted legislation aimed at requiring rideshare firms to treat contract drivers as employees, a measure that hits

at the business model of companies like Uber and Lyft.

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