Autonomous trucking startup TuSimple gets a million-square-foot facility at AllianceTexas

January 26 2022, by Natalie Walters, The Dallas Morning News

Real estate developer Hillwood is making a large bet on autonomous trucking taking off.

Global autonomous driving tech company TuSimple is getting a 1-million-square-foot facility at Hillwood's 27,000-acre AllianceTexas development in North Fort Worth. It will have launch pads and landing pads for autonomous trucks that use TuSimple's Autonomous Driving System.

TuSimple trucks drive on their own, but for now, a safety driver and test engineer sit in the vehicles, according to the company. On Dec. 22, the company completed its first fully autonomous semi-truck run on public roads without anyone inside on an 80-mile trip from Tucson to Phoenix.

The new AllianceTexas facility will be part of the development's Mobility Innovation Zone, an area that allows companies to test, prove and commercialize their technologies. The site off Interstate 35 near Fort Worth Alliance Airport provides a centralized location for TuSimple, which went public in 2021 and is valued at about $3.9 billion.

AllianceTexas is home to other innovative companies, including Bell, Wing, BNSF and Deloitte.

"We partnered with TuSimple, a leader in autonomous trucking, to

provide the guidance and technical parameters required to prepare this new facility for the rapid adoption and expansion of autonomous trucking operations throughout the region and beyond," Hillwood chairman Ross Perot Jr. said in a statement.

TuSimple, which is headquartered in San Diego and has offices in Tucson and Fort Worth, said the new facility will serve as a stop along its Autonomous Freight Network. The network was first announced in July 2020 and includes autonomous trucks, digitally mapped routes and strategically placed terminals along high-volume freight routes.

The company's goal is to improve trucking safety as well as increase efficiency, operational costs and trucks' carbon footprint, according to its website.

"Hillwood's investment in these properties will make it easier for companies to adopt, integrate and scale autonomous trucking operations," said TuSimple CEO Cheng Lu in a statement.

TuSimple's infrastructure specifications will be implemented into other AllianceTexas buildings in the future so they can work within the freight network, according to the companies' announcement.

In June 2021, TuSimple opened a 2.5-acre logistics hub in AllianceTexas' innovation zone that created 50 jobs. The site supports shipping routes along the highway system connecting Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston, Austin and San Antonio.

Texas has been a popular testing destination for autonomous vehicles due to its climate and flat roads. Kodiak Robotics, based in Mountain View, Calif., has a facility in Dallas-Fort Worth for freight testing and operations. In December, Amazon-backed self-driving vehicle firm Aurora said it would integrate its driverless tech with Uber Freight's

logistics platform to haul shipments between Dallas and Houston.

And earlier this month, Dallas City Council approved a package of tax incentives and grants totaling more than $3 million to help attract a $160 million Ford Motor Co. and Argo AI self-driving vehicle facility.

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Citation: Autonomous trucking startup TuSimple gets a million-square-foot facility at AllianceTexas (2022, January 26) retrieved 26 April 2024 from https://techxplore.com/news/2022-01-autonomous-trucking-startup-tusimple-million-square-foot.html

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