

Uber introduces new safety features, including 911 access from app

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Uber CEO Dara Khosrowshahi announces sweeping changes to the ride sharing app after accusations of sexual assault and other safety concerns.

Uber's new CEO has taken a sharp turn in an attempt to move the company forward on safety issues that have dogged the ride-hailing service since it launched in 2009.

The company announced on Thursday [a series of new security measures](#) including a button within its app that connects riders with the 911 emergency system.

Uber also announced a plan to beef up its driver screening program by re-running criminal background checks every year and investing in new technology to monitor any changes in legal status between those annual reviews.

Uber CEO Dara Khosrowshahi described the initiatives Thursday on "Today" as necessary for a company that has taken heat for its past inaction.

"We were not perfect, and anytime you're growing as fast as you're growing ... sometimes you get things wrong," he said. "Our intent now is to get things right."

Uber, he said, is also testing out even quicker ways for riders to notify authorities of an emergency. The company has partnered with emergency response startup [rapidSOS](#) for a pilot program where location and trip details would automatically be relayed to a 911 dispatcher as soon as the app's emergency system is triggered.

Uber, which says it does 15 million trips per day worldwide, has been testing the new features with Denver's 911 system.

"Every day, our technology puts millions of people together in cars in cities around the world," Khosrowshahi said in a [blog post](#). "Helping keep people safe is a huge responsibility, and one we do not take lightly."

Among the other additions is a "Trusted Contacts" feature that will allow riders to more easily share details of their trip with loved ones in real time.

And more changes lie ahead: Uber announced Tuesday that former Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson is coming aboard as chairman of the company's safety advisory board, which was created in 2015.

Uber is also planning to expand the e-bike start-up it acquired, Jump, into Washington after first [piloting the program in San Francisco](#) earlier this year. Another transportation service, Uber Rent powered by [Getaround](#), which allows car owners to rent out their vehicles, will set off in San Francisco later this month. The service is currently available in the Bay Area, Boston, Chicago, Washington, and New Jersey.

The changes and expansions signal how much is at stake for Khosrowshahi, formerly the CEO of Expedia, who took over the top job at Uber [in August 2017](#) following a series of scandals that preceded co-founder Travis Kalanick's departure as chief executive. Kalanick remains on Uber's board.

Uber is also shifting gears after months of bad publicity over its safety record.

Most recently in March, a [self-driving Uber SUV struck and killed a woman](#) in Tempe, Arizona, in what's believed to be the first fatality of a pedestrian involving the autonomous car technology.

Khosrowshahi on "Today" said the company is working with federal investigators to determine who was at fault and conducting a "top-to-bottom audit" of safety procedures.

"We're absolutely committed to self-driving cars. This is an important technology," Khosrowshahi said. "Ultimately, self-driving cars will be safer than humans."

Uber's troubles also include a spate of rapes and sexual harassment experienced by female passengers. Last November, [two women sued the company](#), alleging they were sexually assaulted by their drivers during Uber trips. The suit came just two weeks after news broke that the terror suspect in the Halloween truck attack in New York City was a registered Uber driver [who passed a background check](#).

The service was banned from London last summer after regulators found "a lack of corporate responsibility in relation to a number of issues which have potential public safety and security implications."