

Delivery robots cleared to drive on Washington sidewalks

By TOM BANSE
Northwest News Network

OLYMPIA, Wash. — Wheeled autonomous robots to bring online orders to your door have the green light to enter commercial service in Washington state.

Gov. Jay Inslee signed rules of the road into law Tuesday after a robotic delivery vehicle rolled into his office to deliver the bill. The new rules limit the small, battery-powered robots to operating

on sidewalks and crosswalks — unless there are no sidewalks.

The machines have to yield the right of way to pedestrians and bicycles. Maximum speed cannot exceed 6 mph and a human remote operator must always be available to monitor the robot and take control if necessary.

“Hello, I’m a Starship delivery robot,” chirped the six-wheeled machine about the size of a picnic cooler during a demonstration at the foot of the state Capitol steps in

Olympia. The sensor-packed vehicle slowed to a stop when people got very close.

“Thank you, have a nice day,” it blurted from a hidden loudspeaker.

Ryan Tuohy, the Starship Technologies senior vice president for business development, said food delivery to college students could be a good selling point in the Pacific Northwest.

“University campuses are a place where our technology is being accepted and adopted with

enthusiasm that has exceeded our expectations,” Tuohy said. “We certainly hope to engage with universities here in Washington state.”

No one testified against authorizing autonomous delivery robots when the bill wended its way through the Washington Legislature. The vote count on final passage in the state House was 92-2. The bill passed the state Senate unanimously, 46-0. The new rules for sidewalk delivery robots take effect in July.

Travers: First recipient of the scholarship from Astoria

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Long an aspiring marine biologist, Travers traveled with a high school contingent on an expedition to Fiji to work with Operation Wallacea, a global conservation research organization, surveying wildlife and studying coral reefs.

It was during that trip Travers said she realized she’d like to go into the policy side to marry her love of science with the influence of politics.

“There’s only so much scientists can do without the government also establishing those laws,” she said.

Travers is the daughter of Dan Travers, a former commander of Coast Guard Sector Columbia River and a base manager with Life Flight Network, and C.C. Travers, a math teacher at Warrenton Grade School.

She pointed to her belief in leadership, and the importance of training a new generation of leaders, as why her application stood out.

At Astoria, she is co-president of the National Honor Society and math club Mu Alpha Theta, president of the school’s Spanish Club and captain of the school’s team for the National Ocean Sciences Bowl. She has competed in swimming, cross-country and golf.

The University of Oregon is one of 40 schools nationally that take part in the Stamps scholarship program. Travers is the first recipient of the scholarship from Astoria. In addition to her tuition, fees, room and board for four years, she will receive up to \$12,000 for enrichment activities such as internships.

The total value of the scholarship is estimated at \$125,000, said Roger Thompson, the vice president for student services and enrollment management at the University of Oregon. The cost is shared between the university and the foundation.

Myers: ‘It was one of those opportunities you just have to take’

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“It’s just one of those rare things I wasn’t expecting,” he said. “It was one of those opportunities you just have to take.”

In January, Myers resigned as the Portland Fire Chief to become Cannon Beach’s first emergency manager. The decision raised some eyebrows in Portland due to the fact he announced his resignation the day after Hardesty was sworn into office and took oversight responsibility of the fire department.

At the time, Myers cited his passion for the subject and a desire

to be closer to his wife, who had moved Gearhart, as reasons for his departure. Both will be moving back to Portland full time.

While his tenure was short, Myers said he was grateful for the experience.

“I learned more than I ever thought I ever would about the Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake,” he said. “There are people in Cannon Beach that have done a tremendous amount of work ... I’m super impressed with all actions that have been taken already. There’s still a lot to be done ... but it’s been a fantastic opportunity

to learn.”

City Manager Bruce St. Denis said the plan is to figure out how to keep as many of the initiatives Myers began in motion until the city can hire a replacement.

In the past few months, Myers has focused on increasing membership in the Community Emergency Response Team and developing a neighborhood response program.

“We got a lot of momentum when Mike came on and we don’t want to drop anything,” St. Denis said. “But it’s not possible to keep the same pace without a full-time person.”



Mike Myers with Portland City Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty in January.

Clinic: County is among top four most heavily impacted by opioid misuse

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“There’s a lot of people spending a lot of money to go to Portland for something they should be getting here,” said Leslie Ford, the director of clinical innovation at Greater Oregon Behavioral Health Inc.

But some on the North Coast have raised concerns over whether the methadone clinic would increase the call load for medics and other emergency responders who are already responding to a higher-than-average number of overdose calls.

There are several factors that contribute to a high rate of naloxone use by emergency responders. Part of the reason is Clatsop County is among the top four most heavily impacted by opioid misuse and overdose deaths in the state,

Ford said. Oregon Health Authority data shows the county as one of the highest in the state for hospitalizations for opioid overdoses in 2017.

Clatsop County has also been among the worst in the state for prescribing a large number of opioids. In 2015, more than 27 percent of county residents were prescribed opioids, according to the Oregon Health Authority, though that number has steadily decreased over the years.

“I think the rate of addiction in general is higher here,” Ford said.

Higher abuse rates could also be related to the labor-intensive jobs in the timber and fishing industries that can lead to injuries or chronic pain, said Mimi Haley, the CEO of the coordinated care organization.

Data can also be skewed

because it relies on self-reporting by emergency responders, meaning a county that consistently reports naloxone use is likely going to be higher than counties that do not.

But the high rate also suggests a need for more resources before addictions turn into overdoses, Haley said, a problem reflected in many rural Oregon counties.

One of the misconceptions that surround methadone clinics is the fear that more people with addictions will be attracted to the region, and therefore increase the burden of medics and firefighters to respond to more overdoses, Haley said.

“The idea is people are so much less likely to overdose because they are in treatment ... because they are using this medicine,” Haley said. “We don’t represent

an increase in probability. We represent a decrease.”

“It’s not like we’re bringing in new people,” Ford added. “They’re here.”

Duane Mullins, the general manager of Medix, said it’s no surprise to hear the rate of naloxone being dispensed by emergency responders is high in Clatsop County, though he attributes some of the trend to the fact that more agencies are carrying it than before.

Mullins also doesn’t anticipate the methadone clinic will bring any more calls than the ambulance service would already be handling. But he hopes the clinic will help make it so fewer people will need his service down the road.

“The value (of the clinic) is going to be after I’m done with them,” he said.

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