RidePair Responds to Santa Monica Autonomous Vehicle Incident: Safety Must Guide Mobility Futures

Calls for Balanced Transportation Strategy Focused on Human-Centered, Immediate Solutions

SANTA MONICA, CA, UNITED STATES, February 24, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- — In response to a recently reported incident in Santa Monica, where a vehicle operated by the Waymo autonomous driving system struck a child near an elementary school during morning drop-off hours, RidePair is urging policymakers and the public to maintain a grounded, safety-first perspective on autonomous vehicle deployment.

On January 23, 2026, near Grant Elementary School in Santa Monica, a Waymo autonomous vehicle made contact with a child who suddenly entered the roadway from behind a parked SUV while walking to school. The vehicle's autonomous system detected the pedestrian and slowed sharply — reducing speed from approximately 17 mph to under 6 mph — before the collision occurred. The child sustained minor injuries and was evaluated by emergency responders before being released.

The incident has since prompted a formal investigation by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), which is reviewing whether appropriate caution was exercised given the proximity to a school zone and the presence of young pedestrians during peak drop-off traffic.

Innovation Must Walk Hand in Hand With Safety and Real-World Readiness

While autonomous systems incorporate advanced sensors and real-time AI decision-making, unexpected events — especially involving vulnerable road users like children — remain among the most challenging conditions for any driving technology. RidePair supports continued technological advancement, but insists that safety, accountability, and transparent regulatory oversight must guide deployment timelines and public policy.

"Transportation impacts human lives — not test tracks. Safety must lead innovation, not lag behind it," said a RidePair spokesperson. "This incident underscores that we cannot rely on experimental systems as the sole solution to congestion and climate goals."

Shared Mobility: A Practical Path to Safer Streets Today

While autonomous vehicle technology continues to evolve, RidePair's mission is to deliver immediate, practical impact by reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT) — one of the most consistent, data-backed ways to lower congestion, collisions, and emissions.

Through its pairing platform, RidePair provides:

Immediate reductions in single-occupancy vehicle trips

Lower traffic risk exposure on school routes and commuter corridors

Cost-reducing or even cost-eliminating commuting options

Opportunities for income generation through ride sharing

Unlike unproven autonomous deployments, pairing leverages real behavior change now to improve mobility outcomes.

Balanced and Responsible Transportation Policy

RidePair supports a diversified mobility strategy that includes:

Robust safety requirements for autonomous vehicle deployment

Community-centered regulatory oversight

Proven shared mobility and pairing incentives

Clear metrics tied to safety, emissions, and equity outcomes

"As cities and states evaluate future transportation pathways — from electrification to congestion pricing and AI-driven systems — we need solutions that protect communities today while responsibly preparing for tomorrow," the spokesperson added.

About RidePair

RidePair is a California-based commuter technology platform redefining carpooling as "Pairing" — an incentive-aligned shared mobility approach that helps reduce congestion, cut emissions, and enable commuters to reduce or even eliminate their commuting costs while advancing practical transportation solutions available today.

For more information, visit www.ridepair.io

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