LOVE IN A ~~ELEVATOR~~ ROBOTAXI

Can good design stop content creators from having sex in robotaxis?

Autonomous vehicle designers have to worry about riders getting frisky in public.

JONATHAN M. GITLIN – 1 OCT 2026 21:19 | 121



Credit: Aurich Lawson | Getty Images

TEXT SETTINGS

Humans can be a frisky bunch, and it wasn't very long after Tesla Autopilot started letting drivers go hands-free before people decided to post footage of themselves having sex from the driver's seat. Recently, The San Francisco Standard interviewed multiple people who claimed to have had sex in robotaxis belonging to General Motors' now-defunct Cruise. "There's no one to tell you, 'You can't do that.' It gets to the point where you're more and more and more comfortable, and if you're with someone, like a more serious partner, it can escalate to other activities," one man told SF Standard.

"The interiors of vehicles has been sexualized and appropriated for sex since forever in popular culture. You can see it in movies, you can see it in lyrics, you can see it in photography," said Alexandros Rouchitsas, a human factors/UX researcher and one of the organizers of a recent workshop, "Love in Traffic," that brought researchers from academia and industry together in late September in Sweden to consider how design can help the problem.

A growing problem?

One difference between a robotaxi and a human-driven ride is the removal of the social obligation to interact with a human driver. There's no need to make small talk, and you won't have to listen to someone's terrible opinion, which can lead to riders assuming far more privacy than the cameras and ridership terms and conditions provide. That's a lesson that a pair of teens who hired a Waymo, spent their ride getting drunk, and shot gel beads out the windows learned the hard way this summer.

"You may be driving by yourself, but that's not your classic private environment," Rouchitsas said.

Rouchitsas said there are two prevalent use cases. The first is the content creator. "So you have OnlyFans, you have Pornhub, you have a very mature adult industry in the US. So opportunistic content creators that might perceive this Waymo or public shuttles as studios: very cheap, providing good lighting, soundproof—kind of," Rouchitsas said. The other is tourists, who might not know local customs. "I come from Greece, and I also come from an island, so I know what tourist debauchery looks like, what young people tend to do when they're given context-wise the chance to do so," Rouchitsas said.

Cultural differences are also a concern, particularly with tourists visiting countries with much less permissive societies than the one they are used to. "The important thing is that in the US, someone might take offense. In Sweden, someone might take offense. In other countries, someone might take offense and want to take further action, not stop at offense," Rouchitsas said. "We had a visit at a design studio that specializes in [autonomous vehicles], and there are many brands that operate in the Middle East right now. So there are many brands that operate in Asia, in China. We're talking about countries that have completely different legal frameworks," he said.

Depending on the country, you might not even have the entire robotaxi to yourself. "One of our colleagues mentioned that in India, you don't actually book the whole car. So you book a seat, which means that you might end up, even in the context of a Waymo ride, to be with strangers," Rouchitsas said.

Nowhere to hide

When it comes to the physical design of the robotaxi interior, "You can design against these sort of events in the sense that traditional public transport and traditional private vehicles have been designed," Rouchitsas told Ars. That's particularly true for purpose-designed vehicles like Zoox's robotaxis, or larger autonomous people movers.

"I was checking videos on Pornhub, and I thought to myself, most of these things happen inside public transport, believe it or not, just because the seats are opaque, you can hide behind them. What if you make them transparent? Interior design, that's very easy. And this actually popped up in the workshop—just don't give people curtains to fool around behind," Rouchitsas said.

Reminding riders that they're being monitored is probably a good idea, too. "It should be reminded that privacy does not mean engaging in anything that you wouldn't engage in public. So for instance, public displays of affection should follow rules, not of our bedroom, but probably more closer to our work environments," he said.

That may be a good use for an AI assistant in the cabin. These could be reactive—responding to a bystander who

has become uncomfortable—or proactive, warning riders that they're engaging in risky business and that it's time to stop. As the aforementioned teens found out, occupant monitoring systems can detect intoxicated passengers quite accurately. "You can have AI assistants act proactively as well when you're obviously intoxicated; you can play the mother hostess in a way," Rouchitsas said.

We reached out to Waymo and Zoox to see how they discourage sexual behavior among riders but did not hear back by the time of publication.



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Jonathan is the Automotive Editor at Ars Technica. He has a BSc and PhD in Pharmacology. In 2014 he decided to indulge his lifelong passion for the car by leaving the National Human Genome Research Institute and launching Ars Technica's automotive coverage. He lives in Washington, DC.

121 COMMENTS

STAFF PICKS

Aurich

So Jonathan hits me up the other morning to ask if I can make an image for this story, and I go sure. And my first idea was to make some kind of sticker on a taxi window that was like stick figures making out with a 🚫 around them.

So I'm trolling through Getty stock images just looking to see if there's something I can grab or modify and ... well let's just say that the explicit stick figure stock art market is deeper than imagined. I will uh, not be posting the things I found here.

D:

That was enough for me to realize I was no longer into the idea, and decided to photoshop some skimpy panties onto a taxi sign.

Sometimes your first idea is not your best idea!

Also, somewhat related: My friend used to be a tech with Round 1, the chain of Japanese arcade games, and he was telling me they had this problem with the 'environmental' games. Anything with a booth or curtain where you're enclosed, like there was a House of the Dead shooter that was sealed so it was dark inside.

They had to take all the doors off to keep people from abusing the privacy.

1 Oct 2026 at 21:28

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