Lawmakers on transportation committee discuss delivery robots

BY LRC

FRANKFORT — Robots are here – and sometimes they bring dinner directly to your door.

The Interim Joint Committee on Transportation discussed potential legislation to regulate those robots, also known as personal delivery devices, in the commonwealth on Tuesday.

Rep. Chris Lewis, R-Louisville, filed House Bill 741 this year, but the bill did not become law.

The legislation would have defined a personal delivery device as a device intended primarily to transport cargo on sidewalks, crosswalks, bicycle lanes or paths; shoulders, sides of streets or roadways or highways; parking lots or similar areas.

Most personal delivery devices operate autonomously.

HB 741 would have also restricted the speed of the devices and required $100,000 in liability insurance for the companies deploying the devices.

DoorDash has been advocating for legislation like HB 741 across the country in recent years, according to Jake Holmgreen, senior associate of southeast government relations for the delivery company.

"This year alone, especially in the south, we've had a lot of success passing legislation," he said. "We just last month passed legislation allowing this in North Carolina."

DoorDash has developed its own personal delivery device called Dot. The red robot weighs 350 pounds, can carry up to 30 pounds of cargo and can travel up to 20 mph. Holmgreen said the devices are autonomous and are for deliveries within 3 to 5 miles.

Bud Kraft LRC Photography Supervisor

Sen. Gary Clemons, D-Louisville, expresses concern about job losses in relation to personal delivery robots during Tuesday's Interim Joint Committee on Transportation meeting.

Currently, Dot is only operating in California and Arizona.

Holmgreen said safety is a priority for DoorDash. While every Dot is autonomous, the company has humans on standby that can take over operating the robot remotely and can communicate with humans on-site through its built-in two-way radio.

The robots are also equipped with lights and cameras, and the company carries $100,000 in liability insurance.

"It will also make sounds," Holmgreen said. "And it's designed to behave as a cautious bicyclist, so deferring to pedestrians, vehicles, other cyclists, that sort of thing."

The purpose of Dot and other personal delivery devices is to meet the increasing demand for delivery across Kentucky and the country, Holmgreen said.

"The robot would take priority of kind of smaller orders to allow those dashers, those human drivers, to complete larger, more financially rewarding, lucrative deliveries," he said. "We're not looking to replace drivers, right? We're looking to supplement their work and keep up with the increase of demand and also give them better earning opportunities."

During discussion, Sen. Gex Williams, R-Verona, asked Holmgreen to provide more information on the data the company has on the milage and safety of these devices.

"You're collecting data. Do you have any data on the safety, the amount of mileage, that sort of thing?" Williams asked.

Holmgreen said DoorDash has around 200,000 miles on the road with its personal delivery devices so far with no reported major safety incidents or injuries.

Safety was also on the mind of Rep. Anne Gay Donworth, D-Lexington. She said she's almost hit one of these types of devices with her car in Lexington. She believes any potential legislation regulating these robots should have a higher liability insurance requirement.

"I would encourage an increased amount of liability coverage. If you're talking about an accident and it involves multiple cars or pedestrians, additional health emergencies come out of it," she said.

On the topic of the human impact of the devices, Donworth also advocated for better pay for human delivery drivers.

Sen. Gary Clemons, D-Louisville, wanted to know more about the humans monitoring the devices remotely for issues.

Holmgreen said he did not have an exact number to share, but he knows there are humans monitoring the devices 24 hours a day, seven days a week and each person has a group of robots assigned to them.

Clemons said the potential job loss for humans is a concern for him.

"I'm concerned any time we do something autonomous that we're losing jobs, and that's one thing I'm definitely not interested in," he said.

The Kentucky General Assembly cannot take action on legislation until the 2027 legislative session begins on Jan. 5.

The next Interim Joint Committee on Transportation meeting is scheduled for Sept. 1 at 1 p.m. For more information, visit legislature.ky.gov.

Bud Kraft LRC Photography Supervisor

Sen. Christian McDaniel, R-Ryland Heights, shares his concerns about the road fund revenue shortfall during Wednesday's Interim Joint Committee on Appropriations and Revenue Committee meeting. McDaniel also serves as co-chair of the committee.

Interim committee receives update on state budget revenues

BY LRC

FRANKFORT — Kentucky saw a higher than predicted increase in general fund revenue at the end of the 2025-26 fiscal year, while the state's road fund did not.

State Budget Director John Hicks gave the Interim Joint Committee on Appropriations and Revenue an update on the numbers Wednesday.

At the conclusion of the 2025-26 fiscal year, Hicks said the state general fund received $476 million more in revenue than the official estimated total. The budget reserve trust fund also now sits at $2.9 billion.

Sales and use tax, individual income tax and major business tax receipts were major contributors to the general fund revenue in the last fiscal year, according to Hicks.

"The headliner is sales and use (tax) at 6.4% (growth)," he said. "… Having 6.4 is a really good year. It shows, again, that nationally, consumption drives the U.S. economy."

The individual income tax receipts also grew by 4.6%, despite the individual tax rate dropping from 4% to 3.5% in January.

"That's always a good statement about wages and salaries," Hicks said about the growth.

During the presentation, Hicks noted that lottery receipts grew by 5.5%.

"We continue to find that interesting given we have sports wagering in Kentucky," Hicks added.

Sen. Amanda Mays Bledsoe, R-Lexington, said the lottery receipts caught her attention as well.

"Especially since we consistently hear how much it's dropping and the impact that has on some of our higher education dollars," she said. "Any indication on why that raised? … Are you tracking the impact of both moving forward to see if there's any trends related to the lottery or sports gambling?"

Hicks said that, according to a member of his staff, revenues increase in a year with high Powerball jackpots.

"Scratch-off tickets are a major component of their revenue streams," Hicks said. "Both of those did well. The thing that is kind of hard to guess is those

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Legislators receive update on national education assessment numbers

BY LRC

FRANKFORT — The Interim Joint Committee on Education heard testimony Tuesday about the latest numbers from the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Jennifer Stafford, associate commissioner of the KDE's Office of Assessment and Accountability, offered a NAEP overview. She said it's often referred to as the nation's report card, first administered in 1969. It provides states benchmarks for comparison and benchmarks for each state to compare its prior data.

"The NAEP is given to a sample of students, so not all students nor all schools participate," she said.

Stafford reported on the 2024 NAEP math and reading results from grades 4 and 8. The 2026 assessment was administered during the winter, and the results are not available yet.

From 2022 to 2024, Kentucky's grade 4 reading score increased from 217 to 218, and the grade 4 math score increased from 234 to 238. Both increases outpaced national averages.

Stafford said the improvement in reading marked a "statistically significant change, and that's to be celebrated because that's a meaningful difference." Nationally, the number fell 2 points to 214.

In grade 8, Kentucky's scores did not change in reading but increased from 269 to 271 in math while national scores fell in both categories.

Committee Co-Chair Sen. Stephen West, R-Paris, said it appears funding to improve scores is being used in an efficient manner.

"I want to give you some positive feedback," he said. "I think your implementation on Read to Succeed and numeracy has been very effective. When we first did that, honestly, I didn't expect much results for four of five years, and I think you're way ahead of schedule."

Committee Co-Chair Rep. James Tipton, R-Taylorsville, said lawmakers can pass bills but progress also depends on implementation. He said he has attended conferences this summer, hearing discussion about the "Mississippi miracle."

"There is a new term out there. It's called the 'southern surge' because states in the South have followed Mississippi, and we're seeing the benefit of that," he said.

Hargis David Michael

Sen. Stephen West, R-Paris, speaks Tuesday during a meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Education. Legislators received an overview of the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Proposed Tax Notification for Non-Recallable Rates

The Owen County Board of Education is proposing a general fund tax levy of 74.6 cents on real property and 74.6 cents on personal property.

The General Fund tax levied in fiscal year 2026 was 71.3 cents on real property and 71.3 cents on personal property and produced revenue of $5,433,352.71. The proposed General Fund tax rate of 74.6 cents on real property and 74.6 cents on personal property is expected to produce $6,095,010.98. Of this amount, $648,058.38 is from new and personal property. The compensating tax for 2027 is 71.1 cents on real property and 71.1 cents on personal property and is expected to produce $5,809,920.72.

The proposed rate is expected to generate more revenue than received in the preceding year. The general areas to which revenue of $661,658.27 above 2026 revenue is to be allocated are as follows: Cost of collections, $23,819.70; building fund, $0; instruction, $637,838.57; transportation, $0; and maintenance of plant, $0.

The General Assembly has required publication of this advertisement and information contained herein.

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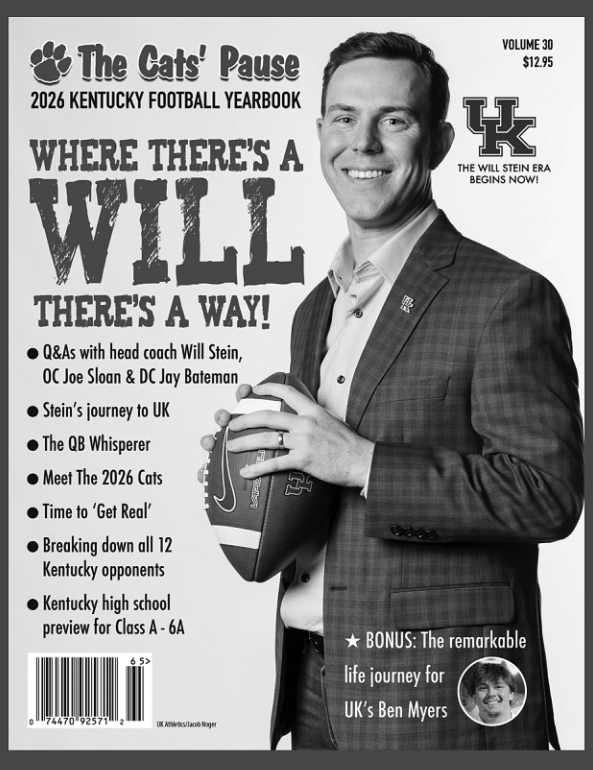

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