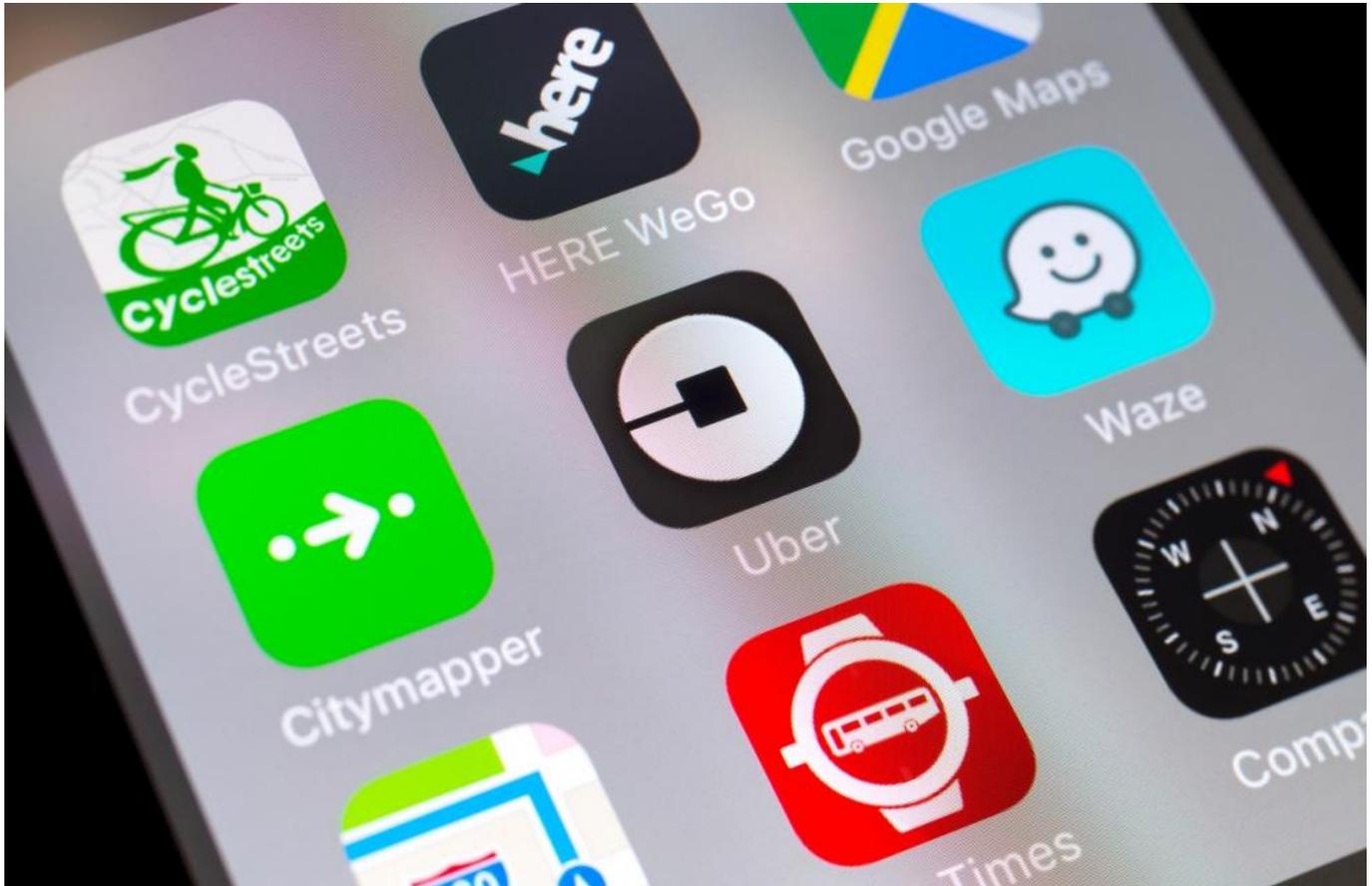


## Hot Clicks: NASA and Uber Work on Flying Taxi Software

Rounding up IT and advanced tech-related news impacting government and industry.

[Amanda Ziadeh](#)

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NASA is taking a stab at lower-altitude airspace. It recently contracted Uber to develop software for managing flying taxi routes similar to the ride-hailing services it designed on the ground.

The contract intends to solve the problem of operating hundreds of aircraft over urban areas by letting uberAIR services work with existing air traffic control systems around airports. So, Uber is building the software to manage networks of flying taxis in the sky.

Meanwhile, Uber wants to start testing four-passenger flying taxi services in Los Angeles in 2020. And similar to the growth and expansion of its current services, Uber wants to speed up development of a new industry of electric, on-demand urban air taxis customers can order on their smartphones. It wants to introduce paid intracity flying taxi services (or “ridesharing in the sky”) in 2023, and is working with aviation regulators to do so. [Reuters](#)

## **From Elon Musk’s AI Lab to Standalone Startup**

Four robotics and AI researchers from the University of California, Berkeley and OpenAI, a lab founded by Elon Musk, teamed up to launch their own startup. Called Embodied Intelligence, the company wants to transform manufacturing by developing a new level of robotic automation designed for factories, warehouses and eventually, everyday homes.

The company has \$7 million in capital venture funding and focuses on complex algorithms that will allow machines and existing robots to learn new tasks on their own, like installing car parts they haven’t installed before. They are building off the concept of teachable robots and AI that lets robots learn.

Ultimately, the startup wants robots to teach themselves how to perform a new task in a warehouse or factory without having to be reprogrammed. [New York Times](#)

## **Stephen Hawking Says AI Can Help or Destroy Us**

“Success in creating effective AI could be the biggest event in the history of our civilization. Or the worst. We just don't know,” the world-renowned physicist said at a technology conference in Lisbon, Portugal. He also previously said AI could one day reach a level where it outperforms humans, becomes “a new form of life” and even replaces, destroys or enslaves humans if it learns to improve and design itself.

This isn’t the only threat to Earth, according to Hawking.

Don’t panic, but he believes we’re doomed either way, and that humans have around 100 years to leave Earth if we want to survive as a species. He seems pretty adamant about looking for a new planet to live on, because Earth is getting too crowded, we’ve caused disastrous climate change and we need to “break through the technological limitations preventing us from living elsewhere in the universe,”

Hawking said. [Newsweek](#)

## **Can Fitbits Help with Precision Medicine?**

The National Institutes of Health hopes so. The agency recently purchased 10,000 Fitbit devices for participants of the All Of Us study, originally the Obama administration's Precision Medicine Initiative, with the goal of gaining anonymous health information from 1 million Americans.

The project received volunteers through an open enrollment process, and this first round of Fitbits is just the start of it. Participating citizens get to choose from two Fitbit models: Charge 2 and Alta HR. These devices will provide everyday health data, which is critical to the study. They collect data on sleep, heart rate information, physical activity, energy levels and walking habits.

Fitbit is the first wearable tech to get the go from NIH for the project. The study will run for a year with these devices and set the stage for how wearables will be used for the All Of Us program in the future. [TechCrunch](#)

## **A Warning for Automating Office Work with AI**

Tech investor Kai-Fu Lee, former head of Google research in China, believes AI could actually replace white-collar routine office work before hitting blue-collar work. In fact, he says investments by his company Sinovation Ventures already proves this; he's backed a company that uses machine learning to determine eligibility for a payday loan, and others that automate customer service and training.

Lee identified four nonsequential waves of AI:

The first is fueled by the availability of lots of labeled data, giving big internet companies an advantage in building business and AI expertise. The second relates more to workplace disruption, and is based on the availability of company data in industries like law and accounting (machines can search through documents when researching a case quicker than humans). The third relies on companies generating data through new products or apps, and the fourth wave would bring fully automated services, like self-driving cars. [MIT Technology Review](#)

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