

# Panasonic autonomous wheelchair: 6 things you need to know

[Health & Medicine](#), [Disability](#)



People with disabilities (about 15% of the World's population) face a number of challenges in going through their day to day activities. Despite this major setback, they are still faced with other 'man-made' problems such as lower quality of education, lesser job and financial opportunities and even pitiable health schemes and provisions being made available to them. The United Nations, World Health Organization and some other notable bodies, individuals and organizations are increasingly helping to create conducive living conditions for the world's largest minority group. Panasonic, a giant in the electronic industry appeared in the Forbes Top Regarded Companies 200 list as the 10th place. This came after 99 years of amazing products and one which stood out in helping disabled persons: the autonomous wheelchair. In 2017, the company made flying or rather 'pre-flying' easier for persons with limited mobility. They are so many amazing details to bear in mind about this awesome machine. Let's have a look, shall we?

## **Panasonic and Whill**

The Japanese electronics giants had to take a lesson or two from the Automatic Vehicle Specialists, WHILL Inc., so a partnership was born for this wheelchair. WHILL Inc. is a San Francisco based company with expertise in automatic vehicles. The product was given the name 'WHILL NEXT'.

### **A third collaboration**

In the trial stage for the WHILL NEXT wheelchair, collaboration was reached between Panasonic, WHILL Inc. and the Japan-located Haneda Airport. The technical trial was scheduled for a time frame of August (8) 2017 to March (31) 2018. It was designed to check and evaluate the key features which the

machine boasts of. The airport was to make further input by improving the workflow of its staff and ensuring same for their airline partners.

### **Key technological features**

The automated robotic electric wheelchair has three key technological features. These are the automated mobility function, the automatic stop function and the tandem movement function. The automated mobility function enables the wheelchair to identify its exact location and move by itself on auto-selected routes in order to arrive at a destination. The user is required to select the destination via an attached smartphone. The machine can move itself to and fro destinations like boarding gates around the airport and can auto-pilot itself back to the start point once the user has disembarked. Its automatic stop function is aimed at stopping/ avoiding any possible collision with any form of obstacle. It is also aimed at helping new users of the machine to control it efficiently without hitting any barrier or in case of a wrong operation. Its third function was designed to make a number of the wheelchairs to move a group of persons going to one destination and then return by auto-pilot to the start point as well.

### **Ease of use**

You might wonder how mobility challenged individuals get to use this but be rest assured that WHILL NEXT is designed with its users in mind. All the users need is a mobile application through which orders can be placed directly for transportation to major destinations. The app is said to be very similar to that of Uber and yes, is very easy to use.

**Staff workload**

Like every machine, WHILL NEXT was made with the intent of reducing the workload for an already overworked human race, in this case, the airport staff. As an automated vehicle, it needs little or no input from man in selecting its destination, driving there and returning to its take-off point. They even are wired to drive themselves to a select location at the close of work every day for storage and maintenance. These of course, should ease off quite a large burden from the staff and user, more importantly.

**Cost of the wheelchair**

After an understanding of the very helpful features that this machine comes with, it is left to wonder if it wouldn't cost an arm and a leg to obtain one but Panasonic has not yet revealed the price of these beauties and life savers. From findings, however, WHILL NEXT, has been found to sport similar characteristics with the WHILL Model M which sells for a whopping \$11, 000 apiece. What do you think about the WHILL NEXT? Well, considering all that have been stated above and the fact that persons with limited mobility can get to worry less about air travel, this should be a reasonable price.