Google wins patent for driverless car technology

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(PhysOrg.com) -- News surfaced this week that Google has won a patent for driverless car technology. Google filed the patent in May this year. The application is titled “Transitioning a Mixed-mode Vehicle to Autonomous Mode.” The patent presents a method listing numerous “embodiments” suggested, for a vehicle that switches from being driven by a human to moving, stopping, and parking autonomously.

The patent describes how the car can know where it is located and which direction to drive.

The car would arrive at a specific location and once reaching a “landing strip” could show acceptable parking places for the vehicle.

Additionally the strip may tell the vehicle that it is parked in a region where it can transition into autonomous mode.

The car could get helpful information from Internet-driven data about other spaces available, or which direction to move for the next part of the trip.

The patent presents an example of the vehicle providing a tour of Millennium Park in Chicago The machine could be programmed to stop at a sculpture for five minutes, move to a fountain for five minutes and then to the ice rink for a pre-set amount of time, before returning to its starting point.

“Disclosed are methods and devices for transitioning a mixed-mode autonomous vehicle from a human driven mode to an autonomously driven mode” says the patent. “Transitioning may include stopping a vehicle on a predefined landing strip and detecting a reference indicator. Based on the reference indicator, the vehicle may be able to know its exact position. Additionally, the vehicle may use the reference indictor to obtain an autonomous vehicle instruction via a URL. After the vehicle knows its precise location and has an autonomous vehicle instruction, it can operate in autonomous mode. “

For Google watchers, the patent victory is an easy reminder of all the publicity that the company has enjoyed over its ambitious dream project of driverless cars. Google has used a fleet of cars clocking 190,000 miles on highways, in city traffic and on roads in demonstrating how successful driverless cars can be.

Earlier this year, Google also set up a demo system on its campus to show off driverless golf carts that communicate with sensors.

Google’s project leaders are convinced that smarter vehicles equipped

with specially designed sensors, artificial intelligence, video cameras, and other sophisticated tools could help to make transportation safer.

Of the many reports about the patent victory, BBC's report has raised the question of how the patent might possibly be used. "The patent will allow Google to restrict other companies from using a similar method to switch their cars between human-controlled and automatic modes. Alternatively, it could charge them a fee for a licence."