Leaving the driving to a computer has big benefits

October 22 2013, by Joan Lowy

,FILE -This Sept. 3, 2013, file photo shows a videographer photographing the Google self-driving car during a news conference at the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute's Smart Road in Blacksburg Va. A new study that attempts to quantify the benefits of self-driving cars and trucks says they hold the potential to transform driving by eliminating the majority of traffic deaths, significantly reducing congestion and providing tens of billions of dollars in economic benefits. (AP Photo / The Roanoke Times, Matt Gentry, File)

In some ways, computers make ideal drivers: They don't drink, do drugs,

get distracted, fall asleep, run red lights or tailgate. And their reaction times are quicker.

They do such a good job, in fact, that a new study by the Eno Center for Transportation says self-driving cars and trucks hold the potential to transform driving by eliminating the majority of traffic deaths, significantly reducing congestion and providing billions of dollars in economic benefits.

Former drivers may be able to safely work on laptops, eat meals, read books, watch movies and call friends as they travel. The elderly and disabled may gain critical mobility.

But the study says considerable hurdles to widespread use of self-driving cars remain, the most important of which is likely to be cost.

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