

# Are self-driving cars a good idea?

Driverless cars could soon be a common sight on UK roads, but not everyone thinks they're safe.

## What you need to know

- A self-driving car is a vehicle that does not need a person to control it. It is also called a driverless, autonomous or computer-navigated car.
- A sensor is a device that detects and responds to changes in its surroundings, like heat, light, sound, movement and pressure.
- Radar (which stands for radio detection and ranging) uses electromagnetic waves to work out something's position and its speed. Radars send out waves in short bursts. The waves are reflected back to the radar by objects in its path, a bit like an echo.



The Waymo driverless car.

Car makers and technology companies around the world are racing to develop cars that don't need drivers. The UK Government is investing millions of pounds in self-driving technology, and some driverless cars are already being tested in towns. The vehicles find their way around using high-tech computer systems, sophisticated sensors, radar and cameras. These allow them to react to traffic lights and road signs, as well as to spot lane markings, the edges of roads and obstacles like trees, people and other cars. However, while this all sounds safe enough, there are still some problems with self-driving cars. For example, the cars cannot spot road markings that are hidden by snow. Many cars already have driverless features – they can park themselves, brake automatically to avoid a collision and beep if there is an obstacle nearby. Experts say that driverless cars could be a common sight on UK roads within five years. Are cars that drive themselves a good idea?

### Yes – driverless cars will save lives

People can be dangerous drivers. They get distracted, ignore the speed limit and use their mobile phones while driving. According to a 2015 report from the Department for Transport, 94% of road deaths and injuries are caused by people's mistakes. Some experts say that because self-driving cars constantly watch their surroundings and always obey road laws, they would cause far fewer accidents. They could free up drivers' time, too, allowing them to do other things while travelling, like reading, studying or watching films – and children would get their parents' full attention on long, boring journeys. Driverless cars would also give freedom to people who cannot drive, like the disabled, blind and elderly. Self-driving cars could be better for the environment; as they don't speed, they use less energy. Parking would be less of a problem, too, because people could be dropped off and picked up again later.

### No – driverless cars will cause problems

Putting our trust in driverless cars is too risky. If the technology goes wrong, people could get injured or even die. If other technology fails, like traffic lights, self-driving cars may not be able to work this out and this would cause chaos on the roads. Driverless cars have to be programmed to respond to what happens on the road but it could be difficult to make moral decisions in some situations – for example, should they be programmed to avoid a pedestrian even if it means crashing into a wall and injuring their own passengers? Another tricky issue would be whether the car manufacturer or car owner should be responsible if there was a crash. Self-driving technology would also put taxi drivers out of work. Besides, the billions of pounds driverless technology is costing could be better spent on important issues such as solving climate change or curing cancer.

### YES 3 reasons why self-driving cars are a good idea

- 1 Humans make mistakes and get distracted while driving – self-driving cars are far safer.
- 2 Disabled, blind and elderly people would no longer have to depend on other people or public transport to get around.
- 3 They could save drivers time because drivers could do other things while in the car.

### NO 3 reasons why self-driving cars are a bad idea

- 1 The technology could go wrong and cause accidents – the human brain is better than any computer.
- 2 This is another case of machines taking away precious jobs from humans.
- 3 The money should be spent on more important issues like curing disease or saving the planet.

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