

Calif. bill would set guidelines for self-driving cars

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California lawmakers are starting to get ready for a new automotive era, during which the first self-driving cars will hit the roads.

State Sen. Alex Padilla (D-Pacoima) last week introduced SB1298, which would establish guidelines for such "autonomous vehicles" to be tested and operated in California.

Tech giant Google Inc., Caltech and other organizations have been working to develop such vehicles, which use radar, video cameras and lasers to navigate roads and stay safe in traffic without human assistance. Google has said that computer-controlled cars should eventually drive more safely than humans, who, after all, get sleepy and distracted and can't see in every direction at once.

Padilla, who spent Wednesday riding in one of Google's automated vehicles, agrees.

"The vast majority of accidents are due to human error. Autonomous vehicles have the potential to reduce traffic fatalities and improve safety on our roads and high-

ways," Padilla said. "California is uniquely positioned to be the leader in the deployment of autonomous technology."

If approved, his legislation would direct the California Highway Patrol to develop standards and performance requirements for the safe testing and operation of autonomous vehicles on the state's roads and highways.

In June, Nevada became the first state to legalize self-driving cars. Arizona, Florida, Hawaii and Oklahoma are considering legislation regarding autonomous vehicles.

Last summer, a Toyota Prius equipped for automated driving was involved in a fender-bender near Google's headquarters in Mountain View, Calif. But that wasn't the first recorded crash of an autonomously driven vehicle: It was being operated by a human at the time.

Self-driving cars must legally have a person at the wheel, ready to assume control if anything goes wrong. The driver didn't seem to be a good backup plan in this case.

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