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Autobahn lane to be reserved for driverless car testing

The goal is to network the road and the vehicles to reduce traffic jams and increase road safety. INGO STRATER GERMAN TRANSPORTATION MINISTRY

That silver blur zipping along the Bavarian autobahn may eventually be piloting itself, under a project to test driverless cars on at least one stretch of Germany's famously unrestricted highways.

Plans call for a driverless-car pilot project on a portion of the A9 autobahn, the north-south artery that connects Munich and Berlin, Transportation Ministry spokesman Ingo Strater told reporters earlier this week.

Though driverless cars have already been tested in the U.S. and Germany, the project would be one of the first to equip a stretch of public highway specifically for that purpose.

"The German auto industry has recognized that this field is developing," Strater said. "We want to support that." The autonomous autobahn comes as automakers push forward with cars capable of taking the wheel. Mercedes-Benz showed a self-driving luxury concept this month called the F015 Luxury in Motion. Audi sent an unmanned RS7 down a track at racing speeds last year, Google's self-piloting cars are clocking miles on California roads and within five years, a carmaker will probably start selling a vehicle that can drive itself, Ford CEO Mark Fields said earlier this month.

The German project would enable cars driving on the test section of the autobahn to communicate with each other as well as with the infrastructure itself, Strater said.

Yet to be announced is exactly where and when the autobahn retrofit will be done and how much it will cost.

"The goal is to network the road and the vehicles to reduce traffic jams and increase road safety," Strater said.

Driverless cars will also be tested in three U.K. cities under a plan announced last year.



The German project will first mean testing sensors, measuring systems and vehicle communication, according to the Transport Ministry. A fully autonomous car probably won't hit the autobahn before the end of the year.

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