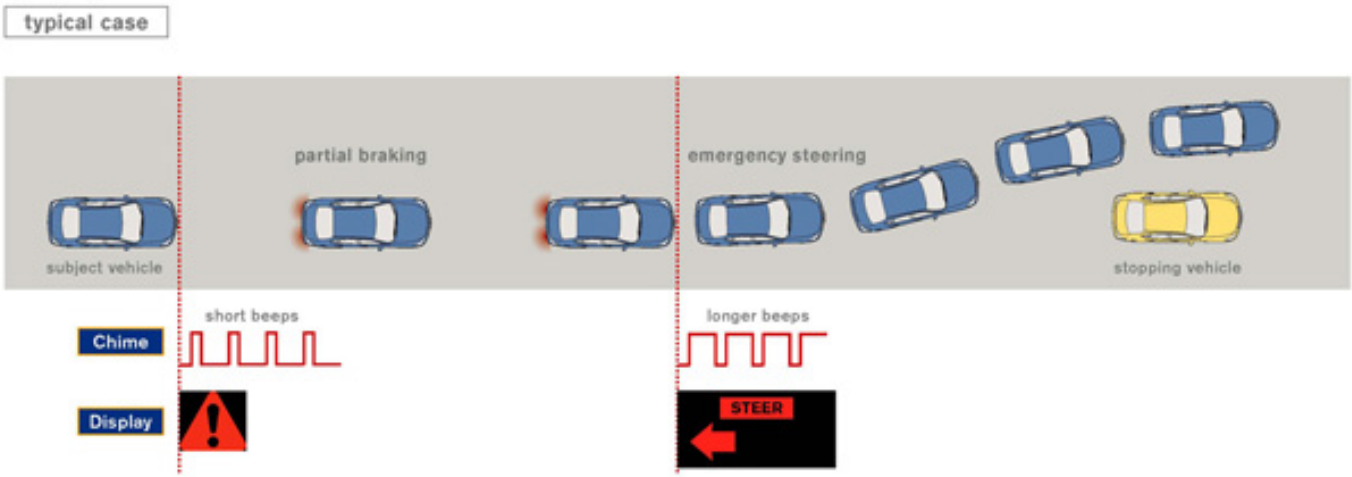
Why I don't trust cars that think for themselves

Kasey Panetta, Associate Editor

Most drivers wouldn't feel comfortable just handing over control of their vehicle to, well, their vehicle, but a new system from Nissan [1]may do just that.

The Autonomous Emergency Steering System, as the name suggests, will take over steering in emergency situations in which a crash could be avoided when you remove human error from the equation. According to Nissan, the primary objective is to use the system when braking alone isn't a sufficient means of avoiding a car crash including, “sudden intrusions onto the road in low speed zones or when a collision at high speed is imminent due to the driver's delayed recognition of the tail end of a traffic jam.”



The system consists of front-mounted radar and camera, the two left and right rear radars, and the five laser scanners attached around the vehicle. Should there be a risk of an accident, the car will first assess the surrounding area, checking for an open space to steer into. Once a space has been found, it will alert the driver via beeps that there is a problem and that he or she should move immediately into the identified free space. Should the drive fail to act in a timely manner, the system will take over and steer the vehicle into the safe zone.

I have mixed feeling about this. On the one hand, human error is a huge part of

traffic accidents and there are more distractions on the road than ever. Plus, if you could find a way, any way, to prevent a fatal accident--or even one that just leaves a bruise--it seems like a no-brainer. However, as with most autonomous car decision systems, it all comes down to what happens when the system fails. As with the automatic brakes [2], it could spell big trouble if this system was a tad too sensitive and went off when there was no danger or if it missed a car to the side and moved the vehicle into a space already occupied by another vehicle. I'm okay with the system alerting me of an imminent crash and suggesting a place to move the car, but if it's okay, I'll do the driving myself.

Source URL (retrieved on *12/12/2013 - 7:48pm*):
http://www.ecnmag.com/articles/2012/11/why-i-dont-trust-cars-think-themselves?qt-most_popular=0

Links:
[1] http://www.nissan-global.com/EN/NEWS/2012/_STORY/121017-01-e.html
[2] http://www.ecnmag.com/articles/2012/08/would-you-trust-brakes-think-you