Apple patent talk: Another keyless wonder as the car sees you approach
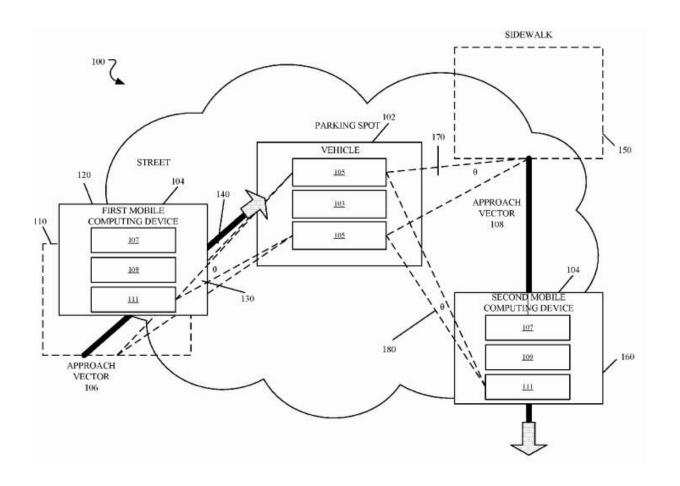
February 13 2019, by Nancy Cohen

Ideas, complaints and arguments over the best safe—and convenient—systems for driver authentication are easy to find. Apple

some time back filed a patent suggesting a way to access the vehicle. The car would recognize the owner's face and unlock the doors.

Unlocking your car with face ID? That is an idea found in the patent filing, "System and Method for Vehicle Authorization." James Foster and Duncan Kerr were named in the filing as inventors.

Biometric authentication could be done on the user's mobile device, granting access to the car. The patent was first filed two years back, in February 2017, and was published earlier this month.

Why focus on Face ID to secure your car? What is wrong with key fobs?

Alex Allegro, *9to5Mac* , had a look at the patent discussion in a widely quoted take on the patent. He distilled the argument raised in the patent filing that key fobs were not the safest solutions around, as anyone with the key fob can operate the vehicle. Also, some conventional remote keyless entry systems are vulnerable to man-in-the-middle attacks.

Another point raised in the patent filing caught Allegro's attention—and that is an entry system that accommodates the shared family vehicle: think separate user profile settings on a computer.

"By the car specifically knowing who is unlocking it," said Allegro, " a shared family vehicle in theory could tailor specific music and driver settings automatically based on the person actively approaching the car."

CNET *Roadshow* explored this, too. Fundamentally, the patent talk's suggestion is that biometrics can be used to not only tell if the allowed user is approaching the vehicle, but telling *which* allowed user is approaching the vehicle.

"The car could then tailor various settings—seat position, radio favorites,

things of that ilk—to the specific user. This bit isn't entirely new, as seat and climate settings have been tied to individual key fobs in the past, but it adds a few extra layers of security on top."

PCMag's Matthew Humphries, meanwhile, raised an intriguing point—that while many would welcome facial identification, "the police would face a new stumbling block with regards to gaining entry to a vehicle, especially an abandoned one."

Still another worthy observation came from a *PCMag* reader in the comments section: What about if you need to take your car in for servicing? For the reader, keys are convenient. The problem he saw is when the attendant needs to drive the car to the service bay. "I don't want to hang around to unlock the car every time they take it out of the service bay." Another reader brought u p the question, "What about valet service?"

Apple watchers got out their possible versus probable meters to say if this patent idea, would continue to be a serious item for product development.

Generally, tech watchers treat all patent news headlines with caution, reminding readers that some patent ideas do not pan out as products in the real world. In this instance, it was filed over two years ago in February 2017. A lot can happen in the space of two years.

Allegro said, "It's worth reiterating that while the patent was published just days ago, its two year gap between filing and publishing accounts for a world of change within Apple surrounding its self-driving car efforts." Earlier this year, he noted, Apple dismissed people from an autonomous car project.

Futurism also noted the "post-axing" factor, saying it was not clear if the

facial recognition patent was "a relic from Project Titan's heyday or if it's still part of an active project within Apple's research labs."

At the same time, Andrew Kroc in CNET *Roadshow* is not prepared to ignore the patent talk: "Adding biometric authentication to the car sounds right up Apple's alley. Touch ID allowed for an extra layer of security when opening a phone or confirming a payment, and the newer Face ID tech does the same, albeit using a person's face instead of their fingerprint."

More information: United States Application [US20190039570](US20190039570)

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