

Driverless bus hits streets of Malaga in southern Spain

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The electric-powered vehicle operates autonomously, but a driver still needs to sit behind the wheel as Spanish law doesn't allow self-driven vehicles yet

A new driverless electric bus has begun operating in the southern Spanish city of Malaga, in a project presented as a first in Europe.

The bus, which began running on Saturday, is equipped with sensors and cameras and links Malaga's port to the city centre on an eight-kilometre (five-mile) loop it does six times a day.

"The bus knows at all times where it is and what is around it," said Rafael Durban Carmona, who heads the southern division of Spanish transport company Avanza that leads the public-private consortium behind the project.

It can "interact with traffic lights," which are also equipped with sensors that alert the bus when they turn red, he told AFP.

The bus uses artificial intelligence to improve its "decisions" based on data recorded along the route.

The 12-metre (39-foot) [vehicle](#), which looks like any other bus, can carry 60 passengers and was developed by Spanish firm Irizar.

Other driverless pilot projects already exist in Europe, but none of them involves a regular-size urban bus that runs on a normal street with other vehicles.

Despite the advanced technology, there is a driver at the wheel to take control if necessary since Spanish law does not currently allow vehicles to operate without a driver.

"We put it in automatic mode and it runs completely autonomously," explains Cristobal Maldonado, the driver.

The project received funding from the Spanish government and was coordinated with several universities.

Last month, Singapore launched a self-driving bus trial with passengers

booking through an app and the bus taking them around Singapore's Science Park, a high-tech business hub, during off-peak hours.

China has also tested driverless taxis in several cities.

An Uber self-driving car hit and killed a woman crossing the street in the United States in 2018, in what is believed to be the first fatality involving an autonomous vehicle.

Lack of regulation and concerns over safety on the part of the general public are two factors often cited by experts that stand in the way of the development of driverless vehicles.

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