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YELLOW LIGHT DURATIONS FOR AUTONOMOUS VEHICLES

Abstract

Aspects of the disclosure relate to controlling a vehicle having an autonomous driving mode. For instance, a current state of a traffic light may be determined. One of a plurality of yellow light durations may be selected based on the current state of the traffic light. When the traffic light will turn red may be predicted based on the selected one. The prediction may be used to control the vehicle in the autonomous driving mode.

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Background/Summary

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS [0001] The present application is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 18/504,729, filed Nov. 8, 2023, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 16/915,253, filed Jun. 29, 2020, now issued as U.S. Pat. No. 11,845,469 the entire disclosures of which are incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND

[0002] Autonomous vehicles, such as vehicles which do not require a human driver when operating in an autonomous driving mode, may be used to aid in the transport of passengers or items from one location to another. An important component of an autonomous vehicle is the perception system, which allows the vehicle to perceive and interpret its surroundings using sensors such as cameras, radar, LIDAR sensors, and other similar devices. For instance, the perception system and/or the vehicle's computing devices may process data from these sensors in order to identify objects as well as their characteristics such as location, shape, size, orientation, heading, acceleration or deceleration, type, etc. This information is critical to allowing the vehicle's computing systems to make appropriate driving decisions for the vehicle.

Description

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0003] FIG. 1 is a functional diagram of an example vehicle in accordance with aspects of the disclosure.

[0004] FIG. 2 is an example of map information in accordance with aspects of the disclosure.

[0005] FIG. 3 is an example diagram of a vehicle in accordance with aspects of the disclosure.

[0006] FIG. 4 is an example pictorial diagram of a system in accordance with aspects of the disclosure.

[0007] FIG. 5 is an example functional diagram of a system in accordance with aspects of the disclosure.

[0008] FIG. 6 is an example bird's-eye view of a geographic area in accordance with aspects of the disclosure.

[0009] FIG. 7 is an example camera image in accordance with aspects of the disclosure.

[0010] FIG. 8 is an example flow diagram in accordance with aspects of the disclosure.

SUMMARY

[0011] Aspects of the disclosure provide a method of controlling a vehicle having an autonomous driving mode. The method includes receiving, by one or more processors of one or more computing devices of the vehicle, a current state of a traffic light; selecting, by the one or more processors, one of a plurality of yellow light durations based on the current state of the traffic light; predicting when the traffic light will turn red based on the selected one; and using, by the one or more processors, the prediction to control the vehicle in the autonomous driving mode.

[0012] In one example, the method includes receiving, by the one or more processors, an updated state of the traffic light and selecting, by the one or more processors, a second one of the plurality of yellow light durations based on the updated state of the traffic light, wherein the selected one and the second one are different durations. In this example, selecting the second one is independent of any state of the traffic light prior to the updated state of the traffic light. In another example, the method also includes determining when the traffic light was last observed in a particular state, and wherein predicting when the traffic light will turn red is further based on the determination of when the traffic light was last observed in the particular state. In this example, the particular state is a flashing yellow light. Alternatively, the particular state is a flashing green light. In another example,

the plurality of yellow light durations includes a first yellow light duration for a solid green circle state of the traffic light and a second yellow light duration for a green arrow state of the traffic light, and the first yellow light duration and the second yellow light duration are different durations. In another example, the plurality of yellow light durations includes a first yellow light duration for a solid green arrow state of the traffic light and a second yellow light duration for a flashing yellow arrow state of the traffic light, and the first yellow light duration and the second yellow light duration are different durations. In another example, the plurality of yellow light durations is stored in a table associated with the traffic light and selecting the one of the plurality of yellow light durations includes accessing the table. In this example, the method also includes determining, by the one or more processors, a duration of a yellow light of the traffic light and storing the determined duration for later use. In addition, the method also includes sending the determined duration to a remote computing device.

[0013] Another aspect of the disclosure provides a system for controlling a vehicle having an autonomous driving mode. The system includes one or more processors configured to receive a current state of a traffic light; select one of a plurality of yellow light durations based on the current state of the traffic light; predict when the traffic light will turn red based on the selected one; and use the prediction to control the vehicle in the autonomous driving mode.

[0014] In one example, the system also includes the vehicle. In another example, the one or more processors are further configured to receive an updated state of the traffic light; and select a second one of the plurality of yellow light durations based on the updated state of the traffic light, wherein the selected one and the second one are different durations. In this example, the one or more processors are further configured to select the second one independent of any state of the traffic light prior to the updated state of the traffic light. In another example, the plurality of yellow light durations includes a first yellow light duration for a solid green circle state of the traffic light and a second yellow light duration for a green arrow state of the traffic light, wherein the first yellow light duration and the second yellow light duration are different durations. In another example, the plurality of yellow light durations includes a first yellow light duration for a green arrow state of the traffic light and a second yellow light duration for a flashing yellow arrow state of the traffic light, and the first yellow light duration and the second yellow light duration are different durations. In another example, the system also includes storing a table including the plurality of yellow light durations, and the one or more processors are further configured to access the table in order to select the one of the plurality of yellow light durations includes. In this example, the one or more processors are further configured to determine a duration of a yellow light of the traffic light; and store the determined duration for later use. In another example, the one or more processors are further configured to send the determined duration to a remote computing device.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Overview

[0015] The technology relates to enabling autonomous vehicles to respond to yellow traffic lights. For instance, when an autonomous vehicle's perception system observes a yellow light at a traffic light intersection, the vehicle's computing devices must decide whether the vehicle should stop or proceed through the intersection. Current approaches for such determinations may involve pre-storing default traffic light durations based on the speed of the traffic lanes at an intersection, geometry of the traffic lanes, and/or other formulas used by city or other governmental bodies to set yellow light durations. However, in reality, there may be a lack of consistency as to how these durations are set across the country and even in the same city. Thus, in many instances, yellow lights may be significantly shorter or longer than expected, which can result in an autonomous vehicle running a red light or stopping immediately resulting in a hard-braking event when there was sufficient time to proceed through the intersection. Other approaches which may include communicating with or receiving information from a traffic light about the duration of a yellow light may not be practical for widespread use.

[0016] To address these shortcomings, rather than simply pre-storing a default yellow light duration for a traffic light, a plurality of default yellow light durations may be stored based upon different possible transitions for that traffic light. For instance, while some traffic lights may only have transitions from green to yellow to red to green again, other types of traffic lights may have different types of transitions. Thus, for each of the different possible transitions for a traffic light, a different default yellow light duration may be stored

[0017] The yellow light durations may be determined in various ways. For instance, human labelers may be asked to label the durations of the yellow lights from videos. As another approach, the durations may be automatically determined by an onboard traffic light detection system software module of an autonomous vehicle.

[0018] In use, as an autonomous vehicle approaches a traffic light, the vehicle's traffic light detection system software module will attempt to detect the current state of the traffic light. Based on the current state of the traffic light, the vehicle's computing devices may determine a duration of the next or current yellow light for the traffic light. In this regard, the vehicle's computing devices may access a pre-stored table of traffic light durations for the traffic light and select a yellow light duration. This selected yellow light duration may then be used to predict when the traffic light will turn red and in turn, to determine whether or not the vehicle should stop for the traffic light.

[0019] This information may also be shared with a remote computing device, such as a backend server computing device. If there is enough of a difference between the duration of the table and the appended duration, this may be used as a signal to flag the traffic light for additional analysis. In addition or alternatively, the server computing device can broadcast the information to other nearby vehicles or all vehicles of a fleet of vehicles. The differences may also be used to determine whether there is any bimodal distribution for a particular traffic light. In other words, the yellow light durations may possibly change at different times of day and/or days of the week (e.g. longer during rush hour or less busy times).

[0020] The features described herein may enable autonomous vehicles to recognize and respond to different yellow light durations for a single traffic light. This may reduce the likelihood of such vehicles from running red lights or abruptly braking at an inappropriate time.

Example Systems

[0021] As shown in FIG. 1, a vehicle **100** in accordance with one aspect of the disclosure includes various components. While certain aspects of the disclosure are particularly useful in connection with specific types of vehicles, the vehicle may be any type of vehicle including, but not limited to, cars, trucks, motorcycles, buses, recreational vehicles, etc. The vehicle may have one or more computing devices, such as computing device **110** containing one or more processors **120**, memory **130** and other components typically present in general purpose computing devices.

[0022] The memory **130** stores information accessible by the one or more processors **120**, including instructions **132** and data **134** that may be executed or otherwise used by the processor **120**. The memory **130** may be of any type capable of storing information accessible by the processor, including a computing device-readable medium, or other medium that stores data that may be read with the aid of an electronic device, such as a hard-drive, memory card, ROM, RAM, DVD or other optical disks, as well as other write-capable and read-only memories. Systems and methods may include different combinations of the foregoing, whereby different portions of the instructions and data are stored on different types of media.

[0023] The instructions **132** may be any set of instructions to be executed directly (such as machine code) or indirectly (such as scripts) by the processor. For example, the instructions may be stored as computing device code on the computing device-readable medium. In that regard, the terms “instructions” and “programs” may be used interchangeably herein. The instructions may be stored in object code format for direct processing by the processor, or in any other computing device language including scripts or collections of independent source code modules that are interpreted on demand or compiled in advance. Functions, methods and routines of the instructions are

explained in more detail below.

[0024] The data **134** may be retrieved, stored or modified by processor **120** in accordance with the instructions **132**. For instance, although the claimed subject matter is not limited by any particular data structure, the data may be stored in computing device registers, in a relational database as a table having a plurality of different fields and records, XML documents or flat files. The data may also be formatted in any computing device-readable format.

[0025] The one or more processor **120** may be any conventional processors, such as commercially available CPUs or GPUs. Alternatively, the one or more processors may be a dedicated device such as an ASIC or other hardware-based processor. Although FIG. **1** functionally illustrates the processor, memory, and other elements of computing device **110** as being within the same block, it will be understood by those of ordinary skill in the art that the processor, computing device, or memory may actually include multiple processors, computing devices, or memories that may or may not be stored within the same physical housing. For example, memory may be a hard drive or other storage media located in a housing different from that of computing device **110**. Accordingly, references to a processor or computing device will be understood to include references to a collection of processors or computing devices or memories that may or may not operate in parallel.

[0026] The computing devices **110** may also be connected to one or more speakers **112** as well as one or more user inputs **114**. The speakers may enable the computing devices to provide audible messages and information, to occupants of the vehicle, including a driver. In some instances, the computing devices may be connected to one or more vibration devices configured to vibrate based on a signal from the computing devices in order to provide haptic feedback to the driver and/or any other occupants of the vehicle. As an example, a vibration device may consist of a vibration motor or one or more linear resonant actuators placed either below or behind one or more occupants of the vehicle, such as embedded into one or more seats of the vehicle.

[0027] The user input may include a button, touchscreen, or other devices that may enable an occupant of the vehicle, such as a driver, to provide input to the computing devices **110** as described herein. As an example, the button or an option on the touchscreen may be specifically designed to cause a transition from the autonomous driving mode to the manual driving mode or the semi-autonomous driving mode.

[0028] In one aspect the computing devices **110** may be part of an autonomous control system capable of communicating with various components of the vehicle in order to control the vehicle in an autonomous driving mode. For example, returning to FIG. **1**, the computing devices **110** may be in communication with various systems of vehicle **100**, such as deceleration system **160**, acceleration system **162**, steering system **164**, routing system **166**, planning system **168**, positioning system **170**, and perception system **172** in order to control the movement, speed, etc. of vehicle **100** in accordance with the instructions **132** of memory **130** in the autonomous driving mode. In this regard, each of these systems may be one or more processors, memory, data and instructions. Such processors, memories, instructions and data may be configured similarly to one or more processors **120**, memory **130**, instructions **132**, and data **134** of computing device **110**.

[0029] As an example, computing devices **110** may interact with deceleration system **160** and acceleration system **162** in order to control the speed of the vehicle. Similarly, steering system **164** may be used by computing devices **110** in order to control the direction of vehicle **100**. For example, if vehicle **100** is configured for use on a road, such as a car or truck, the steering system may include components to control the angle of wheels to turn the vehicle.

[0030] Planning system **168** may be used by computing devices **110** in order to determine and follow a route generated by a routing system **166** to a location. For instance, the routing system **166** may use map information to determine a route from a current location of the vehicle to a drop off location. The planning system **168** may periodically generate trajectories, or short-term plans for controlling the vehicle for some period of time into the future, in order to follow the route (a current route of the vehicle) to the destination. In this regard, the planning system **168**, routing

system **166**, and/or data **134** may store detailed map information, e.g., highly detailed maps identifying the shape and elevation of roadways, lane lines, intersections, crosswalks, speed limits, traffic signals, buildings, signs, real time traffic information, vegetation, or other such objects and information. In addition, the map information may identify area types such as constructions zones, school zones, residential areas, parking lots, etc.

[0031] The map information may include one or more roadgraphs or graph networks of information such as roads, lanes, intersections, and the connections between these features which may be represented by road segments. Each feature may be stored as graph data and may be associated with information such as a geographic location and whether or not it is linked to other related features, for example, a stop sign may be linked to a road and an intersection, etc. In some examples, the associated data may include grid-based indices of a roadgraph to allow for efficient lookup of certain roadgraph features.

[0032] FIG. 2 is an example of map information **200** for a section of roadway including intersections **202** and **204**. The map information **200** may be a local version of the map information stored in the memory **130** of the computing devices **110**. Other versions of the map information may also be stored in the storage system **450** discussed further below. In this example, the map information **200** includes information identifying the shape, location, and other characteristics of lane lines **210**, **212**, **214** which define lanes **216**, **218**, traffic lights **220**, **222**, stop line **224**, crosswalk **230**, sidewalks **240**, stop signs **250**, **252**, and yield sign **260**. In this regard, the map information includes the three-dimensional (3D) locations of traffic lights **220**, **222** as well as information identifying the lanes which are controlled by these traffic lights.

[0033] In some examples, the map information may identify additional information about traffic lights. This information may include, for example, expected states and durations (e.g. how long should a green, yellow or red light last) as well as information identifying which lanes the traffic light controls. In this regard, the map information may store expected states and durations for traffic lights **220**, **222** as well as information indicating that these traffic lights control lanes **216**, **218**, respectively.

[0034] However, rather than simply pre-storing a default yellow light duration for a traffic light, a plurality of default yellow light durations may be stored based upon different possible transitions for that traffic light. For instance, while some traffic lights may only have transitions from green to yellow to red to green again, other types of traffic lights may have different types of transitions, such as from flashing yellow to a solid yellow.

[0035] For a first example, traffic light **220** may include four lights or four light states. These lights or light states may include a solid left red arrow (SLRA), solid left yellow arrow (SLYA), flashing left yellow arrow (FLYA) and solid left green arrow (SLGA). The yellow light duration of the solid left yellow arrow (SLYA) for the traffic light **220** may be different depending upon the transition. For instance, when the traffic light transitions from FLYA to SLYA, the duration of the SLYA may be different from the duration of the SLYA when the traffic light transitions from SLGA to SLYA.

[0036] As a second example, traffic light **222** may include four lights or four light states. These lights or light states may include a solid red circle (SRC), solid green arrow (SGA), solid green circle (SGC), and a solid yellow circle (SYC). The yellow light duration of the solid yellow circle (SYC) for the traffic light **222** may be different depending upon the transition. For instance, when the traffic light transitions from SGC to SYC, the duration of the SYC may be different from the duration of the SYC when the traffic light transitions from SGA to SYC.

[0037] Different transitions can also occur with other traffic light configurations where there are multiple green elements, such as circles and arrows, with only a single yellow light.

[0038] Thus, for each of the different possible transitions for a traffic light, a different default yellow light duration may be stored. For instance, these durations may be stored in a table for each respective traffic light which is appended to map information used to control the vehicle. In this regard, all or some of the traffic lights in the map information may be associated with individual

tables identifying the durations. Some traffic lights (such as those with only three lights) may be associated with only a single default yellow light duration, while other traffic lights may be associated with a plurality of default yellow light durations (one for each possible transition). [0039] For example, Table 1 below is an example table for the traffic light **220**. In this example, Duration 1 is different from Duration 2. This table may be appended to the map information **200** and thus, pre-stored.

TABLE-US-00001 TABLE 1 Traffic Light 220 Observed Next Yellow Next Yellow Light State
Light Light Duration FLYA SLYA Duration 1 SLGA SLYA Duration 2

[0040] For another example, Table 2 below is an example table for the traffic light **222**. In this example, Duration 3 is different from Duration 4. Again, this table may be appended to the map information **200** and thus, pre-stored.

TABLE-US-00002 TABLE 2 Traffic Light 222 Observed Next Yellow Next Yellow Light State
Light Light Duration SLGA SYC Duration 3 SGC SYC Duration 4

[0041] Of course, if there are not enough observations and data for a particular traffic light, there may be no table for that particular traffic light. If there is no table for a particular traffic light, a default yellow light duration based on the speed of the traffic lanes at an intersection, geometry of the traffic lanes, and/or other formulas used by city or other governmental bodies to set yellow light durations may be used.

[0042] The yellow light durations may be determined in various ways. For instance, human labelers may be asked to label the durations of the yellow lights from videos. For example, for different frames (or images) of traffic lights, a human labeler can identify the first frame a yellow light is observed and a last frame the yellow light is observed, and the amount of time between those frames can be extrapolated. However since human labelers are not perfect there will be slight variations in their labels, so an average value over a plurality of different observations of the same traffic light may be used for a particular yellow light duration.

[0043] As another approach, the durations may be automatically determined by the onboard traffic light detection system software module of an autonomous vehicle. This data may be much noisier since lights may be occluded, mis-detected, and other heuristics may change the yellow light timing. Also, it may be difficult to determine which are reliable segments of sensor data from which to extract these yellow light durations. However, by determining yellow light durations in real time, this may be useful to detect changes to the pre-stored durations entered and can be used to flag which traffic lights need to be updated.

[0044] While the map information may be an image-based map, the map information need not be entirely image based (for example, raster). For example, the map information may include one or more roadgraphs or graph networks of information such as roads, lanes, intersections represented as nodes, and the connections between these features which may be represented by road segments. Each feature may be stored as graph data and may be associated with information such as a geographic location and whether or not it is linked to other related features, for example, a stop sign may be linked to a road and an intersection, etc. In some examples, the associated data may include grid-based indices of a roadgraph to allow for efficient lookup of certain roadgraph features.

[0045] Positioning system **170** may be used by computing devices **110** in order to determine the vehicle's relative or absolute position on a map and/or on the earth. The positioning system **170** may also include a GPS receiver to determine the device's latitude, longitude and/or altitude position relative to the Earth. Other location systems such as laser-based localization systems, inertial-aided GPS, or camera-based localization may also be used to identify the location of the vehicle. The location of the vehicle may include an absolute geographical location, such as latitude, longitude, and altitude as well as relative location information, such as location relative to other cars immediately around it which can often be determined with less noise than absolute geographical location.

[0046] The positioning system **170** may also include other devices in communication with the computing devices of the computing devices **110**, such as an accelerometer, gyroscope or another direction/speed detection device to determine the direction and speed of the vehicle or changes thereto. By way of example only, an acceleration device may determine its pitch, yaw or roll (or changes thereto) relative to the direction of gravity or a plane perpendicular thereto. The device may also track increases or decreases in speed and the direction of such changes. The device's provision of location and orientation data as set forth herein may be provided automatically to the computing device **110**, other computing devices and combinations of the foregoing.

[0047] The perception system **172** also includes one or more components for detecting objects external to the vehicle such as other vehicles, obstacles in the roadway, traffic signals, signs, trees, etc. For example, the perception system **172** may include lasers, sonar, radar, cameras and/or any other detection devices that record data which may be processed by the computing devices of the computing devices **110**. In the case where the vehicle is a passenger vehicle such as a minivan, the minivan may include a laser or other sensors mounted on the roof or other convenient location.

[0048] For instance, FIG. **3** is an example external view of vehicle **100**. In this example, roof-top housing **310** and roof-top housings **312**, **314** may include a LIDAR sensor as well as various cameras and radar units. In addition, housing **320** located at the front end of vehicle **100** and housings **330**, **332** on the driver's and passenger's sides of the vehicle may each store a LIDAR sensor. For example, housing **330** is located in front of doors **360**, **362** which also include windows **364**, **366**. Vehicle **100** also includes housings **340**, **342** for radar units and/or cameras also located on the roof of vehicle **100**. Additional radar units and cameras (not shown) may be located at the front and rear ends of vehicle **100** and/or on other positions along the roof or roof-top housing **310**.

[0049] The computing devices **110** may be capable of communicating with various components of the vehicle in order to control the movement of vehicle **100** according to primary vehicle control code of memory of the computing devices **110**. For example, returning to FIG. **1**, the computing devices **110** may include various computing devices in communication with various systems of vehicle **100**, such as deceleration system **160**, acceleration system **162**, steering system **164**, routing system **166**, planning system **168**, positioning system **170**, perception system **172**, and power system **174** (i.e. the vehicle's engine or motor) in order to control the movement, speed, etc. of vehicle **100** in accordance with the instructions **132** of memory **130**.

[0050] The various systems of the vehicle may function using autonomous vehicle control software in order to determine how to and to control the vehicle. As an example, a perception system software module of the perception system **172** may use sensor data generated by one or more sensors of an autonomous vehicle, such as cameras, LIDAR sensors, radar units, sonar units, etc., to detect and identify objects and their features. These features may include location, type, heading, orientation, speed, acceleration, change in acceleration, size, shape, etc. In some instances, features may be input into a behavior prediction system software module which uses various behavior models based on object type to output a predicted future behavior for a detected object.

[0051] In other instances, the features may be put into one or more detection system software systems or modules, such as a traffic light detection system software module configured to detect the states of known traffic signals, a school bus detection system software module configured to detect school busses, construction zone detection system software module configured to detect construction zones, a detection system software module configured to detect one or more persons (e.g. pedestrians) directing traffic, a traffic accident detection system software module configured to detect a traffic accident, an emergency vehicle detection system configured to detect emergency vehicles, etc. These detection system software modules may be incorporated into the perception system **172** or the computing devices **110**. Each of these detection system software modules may input sensor data generated by the perception system **172** and/or one or more sensors (and in some instances, map information for an area around the vehicle) into various models which may output a likelihood of a certain traffic light state, a likelihood of an object being a school bus, an area of a

construction zone, a likelihood of an object being a person directing traffic, an area of a traffic accident, a likelihood of an object being an emergency vehicle, etc., respectively.

[0052] Detected objects, predicted future behaviors, various likelihoods from detection system software modules, the map information identifying the vehicle's environment, position information from the positioning system **170** identifying the location and orientation of the vehicle, a destination for the vehicle as well as feedback from various other systems of the vehicle may be input into a planning system software module of the planning system **168**. The planning system may use this input to generate trajectories for the vehicle to follow for some brief period of time into the future based on a current route of the vehicle generated by a routing module of the routing system **166**. A control system software module of the computing devices **110** may be configured to control movement of the vehicle, for instance by controlling braking, acceleration and steering of the vehicle, in order to follow a trajectory.

[0053] Computing devices **110** may also include one or more wireless network connections **150** to facilitate communication with other computing devices, such as the client computing devices and server computing devices described in detail below. The wireless network connections may include short range communication protocols such as Bluetooth, Bluetooth low energy (LE), cellular connections, as well as various configurations and protocols including the Internet, World Wide Web, intranets, virtual private networks, wide area networks, local networks, private networks using communication protocols proprietary to one or more companies, Ethernet, WiFi and HTTP, and various combinations of the foregoing.

[0054] The computing devices **110** may control the vehicle in an autonomous driving mode by controlling various components. For instance, by way of example, the computing devices **110** may navigate the vehicle to a destination location completely autonomously using data from the detailed map information and planning system **168**. The computing devices **110** may use the positioning system **170** to determine the vehicle's location and perception system **172** to detect and respond to objects when needed to reach the location safely. Again, in order to do so, computing device **110** may generate trajectories and cause the vehicle to follow these trajectories, for instance, by causing the vehicle to accelerate (e.g., by supplying fuel or other energy to the engine or power system **174** by acceleration system **162**), decelerate (e.g., by decreasing the fuel supplied to the engine or power system **174**, changing gears, and/or by applying brakes by deceleration system **160**), change direction (e.g., by turning the front or rear wheels of vehicle **100** by steering system **164**), and signal such changes (e.g. by using turn signals). Thus, the acceleration system **162** and deceleration system **160** may be a part of a drivetrain that includes various components between an engine of the vehicle and the wheels of the vehicle. Again, by controlling these systems, computing devices **110** may also control the drivetrain of the vehicle in order to maneuver the vehicle autonomously.

[0055] Computing device **110** of vehicle **100** may also receive or transfer information to and from other computing devices, such as those computing devices that are a part of the transportation service as well as other computing devices. FIGS. **3** and **4** are pictorial and functional diagrams, respectively, of an example system **400** that includes a plurality of computing devices **410**, **420**, **430**, **440** and a storage system **450** connected via a network **460**. System **400** also includes vehicle **100**, and vehicles **100A**, **100B** which may be configured the same as or similarly to vehicle **100**. Although only a few vehicles and computing devices are depicted for simplicity, a typical system may include significantly more.

[0056] As shown in FIG. **4**, each of computing devices **410**, **420**, **430**, **440** may include one or more processors, memory, instructions and data. Such processors, memories, data and instructions may be configured similarly to one or more processors **120**, memory **130**, instructions **132** and data **134** of computing device **110**.

[0057] The network **460**, and intervening nodes, may include various configurations and protocols including short range communication protocols such as Bluetooth, Bluetooth LE, the Internet, World Wide Web, intranets, virtual private networks, wide area networks, local networks, private

networks using communication protocols proprietary to one or more companies, Ethernet, WiFi and HTTP, and various combinations of the foregoing. Such communication may be facilitated by any device capable of transmitting data to and from other computing devices, such as modems and wireless interfaces.

[0058] In one example, one or more computing devices **410** may include one or more server computing devices having a plurality of computing devices, e.g., a load balanced server farm, that exchange information with different nodes of a network for the purpose of receiving, processing and transmitting the data to and from other computing devices. For instance, one or more computing devices **410** may include one or more server computing devices that are capable of communicating with computing device **110** of vehicle **100** or a similar computing device of vehicle **100A** as well as computing devices **420**, **430**, **440** via the network **460**. For example, vehicles **100**, **100A**, may be a part of a fleet of vehicles that can be dispatched by server computing devices to various locations. In this regard, the server computing devices **410** may function as a validation computing system which can be used to validate autonomous control software which vehicles such as vehicle **100** and vehicle **100A** may use to operate in an autonomous driving mode. In addition, server computing devices **410** may use network **460** to transmit and present information to a user, such as user **422**, **432**, **442** on a display, such as displays **424**, **434**, **444** of computing devices **420**, **430**, **440**. In this regard, computing devices **420**, **430**, **440** may be considered client computing devices.

[0059] As shown in FIG. 4, each client computing device **420**, **430**, **440** may be a personal computing device intended for use by a user **422**, **432**, **442**, and have all of the components normally used in connection with a personal computing device including a one or more processors (e.g., a central processing unit (CPU)), memory (e.g., RAM and internal hard drives) storing data and instructions, a display such as displays **424**, **434**, **444** (e.g., a monitor having a screen, a touchscreen, a projector, a television, or other device that is operable to display information), and user input devices **426**, **436**, **446** (e.g., a mouse, keyboard, touchscreen or microphone). The client computing devices may also include a camera for recording video streams, speakers, a network interface device, and all of the components used for connecting these elements to one another.

[0060] Although the client computing devices **420**, **430**, and **440** may each comprise a full-sized personal computing device, they may alternatively comprise client computing devices capable of wirelessly exchanging data with a server over a network such as the Internet. By way of example only, client computing device **420** may be a mobile phone or a device such as a wireless-enabled PDA, a tablet PC, a wearable computing device or system, or a netbook that is capable of obtaining information via the Internet or other networks. In another example, client computing device **430** may be a wearable computing system, depicted as a smart watch as shown in FIG. 4. As an example the user may input information using a small keyboard, a keypad, microphone, using visual signals with a camera, or a touch screen.

[0061] In some examples, client computing device **420** may be a mobile phone used by passenger of a vehicle. In other words, user **422** may represent a passenger. In addition, client communication device **430** may represent a smart watch for a passenger of a vehicle. In other words, user **432** may represent a passenger. The client communication device **430** may represent a workstation for an operations person, for example, a remote assistance operator or someone who may provide remote assistance to a vehicle and/or a passenger. In other words, user **442** may represent a remote assistance operator. Although only a few passengers and operations persons are shown in FIGS. 4 and 5, any number of such passengers and operations persons (as well as their respective client computing devices) may be included in a typical system.

[0062] As with memory **130**, storage system **450** can be of any type of computerized storage capable of storing information accessible by the server computing devices **410**, such as a hard-drive, memory card, ROM, RAM, DVD, CD-ROM, write-capable, and read-only memories. In addition, storage system **450** may include a distributed storage system where data is stored on a

plurality of different storage devices which may be physically located at the same or different geographic locations. Storage system **450** may be connected to the computing devices via the network **460** as shown in FIGS. **4** and **5**, and/or may be directly connected to or incorporated into any of the computing devices **110**, **410**, **420**, **430**, **440**, etc.

[0063] Storage system **450** may store various types of information which may be retrieved or otherwise accessed by a server computing device, such as one or more server computing devices **410**, in order to perform various actions.

Example Methods

[0064] In addition to the operations described above and illustrated in the figures, various operations will now be described. It should be understood that the following operations do not have to be performed in the precise order described below. Rather, various steps can be handled in a different order or simultaneously, and steps may also be added or omitted.

[0065] FIG. **8** includes an example flow diagram **800** of some of the examples for controlling a vehicle having an autonomous driving mode, which may be performed by one or more processors such as processors **120** of computing devices **110** in order to determine when a traffic light will next turn red. For instance, at block **810**, a current state of a traffic light is determined.

[0066] As an autonomous vehicle, such as vehicle **100**, drives around in the autonomous driving mode, the vehicle's computing devices **110** and/or perception system **172** may detect and identify the location and current state of traffic lights. As noted above, a traffic light detection system software module may be incorporated into the perception system **172** or the computing devices **110** and may access the map information to determine where the traffic light detection system software model should expect to perceive traffic lights.

[0067] FIG. **6** depicts vehicle **100** being maneuvered on a section of roadway **600** including intersections **602** and **604**. In this example, intersections **602** and **604** correspond to intersections **202** and **204** of the map information **200**, respectively. In this example, lane lines **610**, **612**, **614** and lanes **616**, **618** correspond to the shape, location, and other characteristics of lane lines **210**, **212**, **214** and lanes **216**, **218**, respectively. Similarly, crosswalk **630** corresponds to the shape, location, and other characteristics of crosswalk **230**, respectively; sidewalks **640** correspond to sidewalks **240**; traffic lights **620**, **622** correspond to traffic lights **220**, **222**, respectively; stop signs **650**, **652** correspond to stop signs **250**, **252**, respectively; and yield sign **660** corresponds to yield sign **260**. In this example, vehicle **100** is approaching intersection **602** which is controlled by the traffic light **620** as indicated in the map information.

[0068] The computing devices **110** and/or perception system **172** may attempt to identify the state and location of traffic lights along the route. In the example of FIG. **6**, the vehicle's computing devices **110** and/or the perception system **172** may use the traffic light detection system software module may be used to attempt to locate traffic light **220** (corresponding to traffic light **620**) and thereby determine the state of the traffic light **620**.

[0069] As part of this, the perception system **172** may use cameras to capture images of vehicle **100**'s environment. FIG. **7** is an example camera image **700** captured by a camera of perception system **172** of vehicle **100** as the vehicle approaches intersection **602** from lane **616**, for the example of FIG. **6**. In this example, the camera image **700** includes the traffic light **620**.

[0070] These images, as well as other information as described above, may be input into the traffic light detection system software module in order to determine the state of the traffic light **620** as well as other information such as its three-dimensional location. The state may be any number of different values, including for example, “off”, “undetected”, “solid red circle”, “solid yellow circle”, “solid green circle”, “flashing red circle”, “flashing yellow circle”, “solid yellow arrow”, “solid red arrow”, “solid green arrow”, “flashing yellow arrow”, “flashing green arrow”, etc. In this regard, “solid” refers to a light that is not flashing or rather, appears solid to a human observer. In addition, each arrow (solid or flashing) may also be further delineated into its direction, such as “solid left yellow arrow”, “solid left red arrow”, “solid left green arrow”, “flashing left yellow

arrow”, “flashing left green arrow”, “solid right yellow arrow”, “solid right red arrow”, “solid right green arrow”, “flashing right yellow arrow”, “flashing right green arrow”, etc. States such as off and undetected may correspond to traffic lights that are occluded (e.g. by another vehicle, a building or other structure, vegetation, weather conditions etc.) or too far from the vehicle to actually determine. This information may be published by the traffic light detection system software module and made available to the other computing devices and/or systems of the vehicle **100**.

[0071] For example, the traffic light detection system may process camera image **700** and identify a region **720** of the image that includes the traffic light **620**. The traffic light detection system may identify which of the four lights A, B, C, D of traffic light **620** is currently lit. This currently lit light will correspond to the state of the traffic light **620**.

[0072] Returning to FIG. **8** at block **820**, one of a plurality of yellow light durations is selected based on the current state of the traffic light. For instance, based on the current state of the traffic light, the computing devices **110** may use the current state of the traffic light to look up or select a duration for the next or a current yellow light. For example, if the current state of the traffic light is any type of red (e.g. solid red circle, flashing red circle, solid red arrow, flashing red arrow), the computing devices may not need to determine the duration of the next or current yellow light. In other words, for a red light, determining the duration of the next or current yellow light may not be necessary and thus may not be performed by the computing devices **110**.

[0073] If the current state of the traffic light is any type of green (e.g. solid circle, flashing circle, solid arrow, flashing arrow) or a flashing yellow (e.g. flashing yellow circle or flashing yellow arrow), the computing devices may determine the duration of the next yellow light using the current state of the traffic light. In this regard, the vehicle's computing devices may access the table of traffic light durations for the traffic light and select a yellow light duration based on only the current state of the traffic light. Thus, the determination of the next yellow light duration when the current state of the traffic light is any type of green or flashing yellow is based only on the most currently detected state of the traffic light and not any prior states. This may reduce the likelihood of false determinations if the traffic light is partially occluded at different points in time which can lead to errors in the transitions actually observed by the traffic light state detection system.

[0074] As noted above, if there are a plurality of possible transitions for the traffic light, the table may store a plurality of possible yellow light durations. Thus, the computing devices **110** may select one of the plurality of yellow light durations from the table. For example, returning to the example of traffic light **620**, if the current state of the traffic light is determined to be a flashing left yellow arrow (FLYA), then referring to table **1**, the next yellow light duration would be Duration 1. Thus, Duration 1 may be selected. However, when the current state of the traffic light is determined to be a green arrow (GA), then referring to table **1**, the next yellow light duration would be Duration 2. Thus, Duration 2 may be selected.

[0075] As another example, for example, returning to the example of traffic light **622**, if the current state of the traffic light is determined to be a green arrow (GA), then referring to Table 2, the next yellow light duration would be Duration 3. Thus, Duration 3 may be selected. However, when the current state of the traffic light is determined to be a solid green circle (SGC), then referring to Table 2, the next yellow light duration would be Duration 4. Thus, Duration 4 may be selected.

[0076] Returning to FIG. **8**, at block **830**, the selected one is used to predict when traffic light will next turn red, and thereafter at block **840**, the prediction is used to control the vehicle in the autonomous driving mode. For instance, the selected yellow light duration may then be used by the computing devices **110** to predict when the traffic light will turn red and in turn, to determine whether to stop or not for the traffic light. However, in order to provide an accurate prediction of when the traffic light may turn red, the vehicle's computing devices may continue to detect the current state of the traffic light in order to observe exactly when a solid or flashing green (arrow or circle) or flashing yellow (arrow or circle) light turns to a solid yellow light (arrow or circle). At

this point in time, the vehicle's computing devices may simply add the selected yellow light duration to the point in time of the last observed solid or flashing green or flashing yellow light (arrow or circle) to predict when the traffic light will turn red. In this regard, if the last observed solid or flashing green or flashing yellow light (arrow or circle) was not detected, the vehicle's computing devices may assume that a solid yellow light could turn red at any moment and would plan accordingly.

[0077] When the traffic light is predicted to turn red may be used as input to the planning system **168** in order to decide whether to stop or not for the traffic light. Alternatively, the planning system may use the selected yellow light duration as well as the last observed solid or flashing green (arrow or circle) or flashing yellow (arrow or circle) light as input to make a prediction for when the light may turn red, which in turn informs the vehicle's decision as to whether to stop or not for the traffic light. In other words, the planning system may determine exactly whether there is enough time for the vehicle to safely proceed through an intersection when a traffic light is a solid yellow arrow or circle. The planning system may generate trajectories for the vehicle to follow into the future accordingly.

[0078] As noted above, if there is no table for a particular traffic light, for instance because there are not yet enough labels or observations of the duration of yellow lights for the traffic light, a default yellow light duration based on the speed of the traffic lanes at an intersection and geometry of the traffic lanes may be used by the computing devices **110**.

[0079] If the current state of the traffic light is a solid yellow (e.g. a solid yellow circle or a solid yellow arrow) or rather, yellow and not flashing, the computing devices **110** may not need to determine the duration of the next yellow light. However, to determine the duration of the current yellow light, the computing devices **110** may use the state of the last solid or flashing green or flashing yellow light. In this regard, flashing yellow lights are treated like solid or flashing green lights. As such, the vehicle's computing devices may access the table of traffic light durations for the traffic light and select a yellow light duration for the current yellow light based on both the prior state of the traffic light as well as the current state of the traffic light.

[0080] Of course, over time, the state of a traffic light will change. The sensors of the perception system **172** will continue to capture sensor data, and the computing devices **110** and/or the perception system **172** may input this sensor data into the traffic light detection system software module. As such, the traffic light detection system software module may determine an updated state of the traffic light. Each time the state of the traffic light changes, the computing devices **110** may use the changed or updated state to determine the duration of the next or current yellow light so long as the updated state is not red. For instance, the computing devices **110** may select a second one of the plurality of light durations for a given traffic light based on the updated state of the traffic light. In other words, whenever the state of the traffic light changes, the computing devices **110** may reassess the duration of the next or current yellow light and determine that duration accordingly as described above.

[0081] In addition, each time a vehicle's traffic light detection system software module observes a yellow light at a traffic light, the duration of that traffic light may be determined, for instance, by the traffic light detection system software module. Simply put, this duration may be the length of time during which the traffic light detection system software module observes a yellow light, such as a solid yellow circle or a solid yellow arrow. In some instances, if the confidence in the detection of a yellow light and/or its duration is relatively high, this duration may be stored for later use by the computing devices **110**, for example, by appending the duration to the table for that traffic light.

[0082] This information may also be shared with a remote computing device, such as server computing device **410**. In this regard, the computing devices **110** may send, for example via network **460**, the duration for a traffic light to the server computing devices **410**.

[0083] The server computing devices **410** may use this information in various ways. For instance, when there is enough of a difference between the duration of the table and the appended duration,

this may be used by the server computing devices **410** as a signal to flag the traffic light for additional analysis. For instance, a statistical model (e.g. mean and standard deviation) may be used to determine whether the duration of a yellow light of a traffic light deviates enough from the duration in the table for that traffic light, the traffic light can be flagged for review. Such a model may also take into account other things like occlusions, mis-detections or sun angles and in general trust the pre-stored yellow light duration unless there is a high confidence that the pre-stored duration is no longer reliable, good, usable, etc. In addition or alternatively, the server computing device can broadcast the information to other nearby vehicles or all vehicles of a fleet of vehicles. [0084] The differences may also be used, for instance by the server computing devices **410**, to determine whether there is any bimodal distribution for a particular traffic light. In other words, the yellow light durations may possibly change at different times of day and/or days of the week (e.g. longer during rush hour or less busy times). In this regard, in some instances, the table for a particular traffic light may include different yellow light durations not only for different states of the traffic light, but also for different times of day and/or days of the week. Thus, the current time of day and day of the week may also be used by the vehicle's computing devices to select a default yellow light value. However, in some instances, the boundary of when the durations of yellow lights switch may be challenging, and so there may need to be some way to allow uncertainty in which one is correct or allow ones near the boundary of time. In addition or alternatively, a statistical model on when the lights change durations could be built given enough observations of the different durations.

[0085] The features described herein may enable autonomous vehicles to recognize and respond to different yellow light durations for a single traffic light. This may reduce the likelihood of such vehicles from running red lights or abruptly braking at an inappropriate time.

[0086] Unless otherwise stated, the foregoing alternative examples are not mutually exclusive, but may be implemented in various combinations to achieve unique advantages. As these and other variations and combinations of the features discussed above can be utilized without departing from the subject matter defined by the claims, the foregoing description of the embodiments should be taken by way of illustration rather than by way of limitation of the subject matter defined by the claims. In addition, the provision of the examples described herein, as well as clauses phrased as "such as," "including" and the like, should not be interpreted as limiting the subject matter of the claims to the specific examples; rather, the examples are intended to illustrate only one of many possible embodiments. Further, the same reference numbers in different drawings can identify the same or similar elements.

Claims

1. A method comprising: receiving, by one or more processors of a vehicle having an autonomous driving mode, a current state of a traffic light, the current state of the traffic light indicating a color and a type of a currently lit light of the traffic light; determining, by the one or more processors, a yellow light duration for the traffic light corresponding to the current state of the traffic light; and controlling, by the one or more processors, the vehicle in the autonomous driving mode to respond to the traffic light based on the yellow light duration and the current state of the traffic light.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein the type of the currently lit light is a solid light that is not flashing.
3. The method of claim 2, wherein the solid light is in a solid circle state.
4. The method of claim 2, wherein the solid light is in an arrow state.
5. The method of claim 1, wherein the type of the currently lit light is a flashing light.
6. The method of claim 5, wherein the flashing light is in an arrow state.
7. The method of claim 1, further comprising: selecting, by the one or more processors, the yellow light duration from a plurality of pre-stored yellow light durations to predict when the traffic light

will turn red.

- 8.** The method of claim 7, wherein the yellow light duration is selected when the color of the currently lit light of the traffic light is green or yellow.
 - 9.** The method of claim 1, wherein the traffic light is located at an intersection.
 - 10.** The method of claim 9, wherein the vehicle is controlled to stop for the traffic light.
 - 11.** The method of claim 9, wherein the vehicle is controlled to proceed through the intersection.
 - 12.** A system comprising: one or more processors of a vehicle having an autonomous driving mode, the one or more processors configured to: receive a current state of a traffic light, the current state of the traffic light indicating a color and a type of a currently lit light of the traffic light; access a table of a plurality of yellow light durations for different types of states of the traffic light; select a yellow light duration for the traffic light from the table corresponding to the current state of the traffic light; and control the vehicle in the autonomous driving mode to respond to the traffic light based on the selected yellow light duration and the current state of the traffic light.
 - 13.** The system of claim 12, wherein the type of the currently lit light is a solid light that is not flashing.
 - 14.** The system of claim 13, wherein the solid light is in a solid circle state.
 - 15.** The system of claim 13, wherein the solid light is in an arrow state.
 - 16.** The system of claim 12, wherein the type of the currently lit light is a flashing light.
 - 17.** The system of claim 16, wherein the flashing light is in an arrow state.
 - 18.** A non-transitory computer-readable medium storing instructions which, when executed, cause a computing device of a vehicle having an autonomous driving mode to perform a method comprising: receiving a current state of a traffic light, the current state of the traffic light indicating a color and a type of a currently lit light of the traffic light; determining a yellow light duration for the traffic light corresponding to the current state of the traffic light; and controlling the vehicle in the autonomous driving mode to respond to the traffic light based on the yellow light duration and the current state of the traffic light.
 - 19.** The non-transitory computer-readable medium of claim 18, wherein the type of the currently lit light is either a solid light that is not flashing or a flashing light.
 - 20.** The non-transitory computer-readable medium of claim 19, wherein the solid light is in a solid circle state or an arrow state.
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