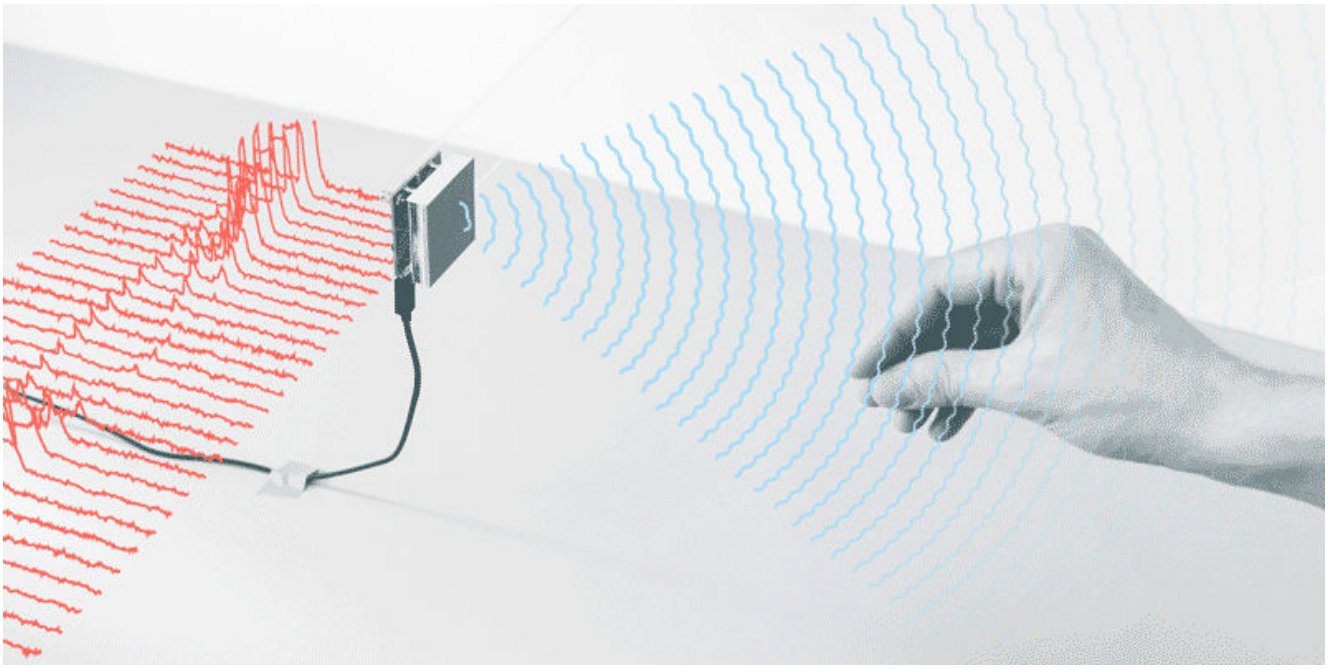
Google’s Pixel 4 rumored to support air gesture system



Enlarge / Project Soli in action.

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We’re at least four months out from the typical Google Pixel smartphone unveiling, but that isn’t stopping the rumor mill from churning. There are already a pair of reports pointing toward a Project Soli-based gesture system being in development for the Pixel 4.

First, a refresher on what the heck Project Soli is. The project has been in development for years inside Google’s ATAP group, with the first public showing happening all the way back in 2015. Soli aims to embed a tiny radar system into a chip that can be used to detect hand motion above a device. Google demoed gestures like moving the thumb and index finger together for a virtual button press or rubbing the two fingers

together to scroll or turn a dial. It has always seemed like something that would be a good fit for a smartwatch, where the tiny touchscreens and UIs limit how much can be done on with smartphone-style input.

Like many ATAP projects, Soli kept a low profile for years, and you would have been forgiven for assuming it was dead—until the project surprisingly gained FCC approval this January.

[embedded content]
Now, about those reports. 9to5Google was the first to float the rumor that Google's next smartphone would be equipped with the radar-based gesture system, and then XDA Developers quickly followed up with actual code evidence. XDA has been tracking a feature in Android Q that uses an "Aware" sensor, which would be a good fit for a consumer-facing name for Soli. The latest Android Q betas allow for Aware-based control of lock screen notifications and gestures to skip and silence music.

Google has been experimenting with air gestures since the second-gen Moto X, which was equipped with IR sensors that would let you wake the display or dismiss alarms or phone calls just by waving your hand across the display.That feature, from before Google sold Motorola to Lenovo, was not useful enough to be brought forward to future Google phones. The Pixel line has been experimenting with weird input methods, too. Both the Pixel 2 and Pixel 3 are squeezable—sensors embedded in the sides of the device allow you to call up the Google Assistant with just a firm squish.

Does anyone out there want air gestures in their smartphone? If Soli does make it to the Pixel 4, Google has some work to do to convince everyone the feature isn't just a gimmick.

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