

Article : eCall is an inevitability rather than a possibility

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eCall is an inevitability rather than a possibility

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A recent report published by European telematics consultants, SBD, gives a timely update as eCall undergoes a period of dramatic change. According to **David McClure**, the future for eCall looks positive ...



With key elements in the European Commission's plans for a pan-European eCall service unresolved, attention is shifting to a new generation of private eCall services being developed by some of Europe's leading vehicle manufacturers.

This is a key finding of a new report from independent consultancy SBD - *Where next for eCall?* - which explores in detail the technical, business and political issues that are shaping the future for European eCall.

eCall is seen as part of a wide range of private telematics services and not simply as a stand-alone publication. This distinction is creating barriers between key stakeholders involved in the development of eCall in Europe, and it is forcing a number of vehicle manufacturers to develop their own private eCall solutions.

This may prompt the EC to shift from its top-down approach to encourage more involvement from the automotive industry and network operators to establish a service that combines both private and public elements.

SBD is firmly behind the eCall initiative, and feels that it's important to get all of the issues out in the open to help manufacturers make informed decisions on how they can bring eCall to market as quickly as possible.

Private vs public

There's a race on between the EC's public eCall service and emerging private eCall services being developed by vehicle manufacturers. It's increasingly likely that eCall

will happen in Europe, and vehicle manufacturers are starting to see it as "inevitable" rather than "possible". However, the exact form the solution will take is still not clear. The EC is persevering with its proposal for a public service.

But a complex situation is developing based on a mix of both public and private initiatives. SBD's report guides the reader through the latest developments and provides an assessment of the urgent measures that need to be taken to overcome the barriers to deployment that have beset eCall up to now.

Securing the future for eCall

There are now two ways forward for eCall in Europe:

- A political approach led by the EC focused on consensus building
- An industry-led approach focused on fast implementation

The EC's ambitions for a cross-border eCall service have yet to gain the commitment needed from all member states, network providers, and the automotive industry, as questions remain unanswered about the technology that will be used, how the system will be administered and where the costs will be borne.

Germany has declared its support for the EC's Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) while France and the UK continue to call for the resolution of many open issues.

Despite the difficulties, the EC is actively supporting a range of activities aimed at solving the open questions and generating momentum towards deployment. These activities include:

- Field Operational Tests (FOTs)
- An implementation platform
- Negotiations with vehicle manufacturers in Europe, Japan and Korea
- Standardisation initiatives

Progress has been made on the standards needed for data content, but there is still no clear agreement on the data bearer.

Other issues covered by SBD's report include political commitment to upgrading Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs), in-vehicle fitment strategies and business models.

At the same time, a number of European manufacturers have launched their own versions of eCall or are in the process of developing private services that provide different forms of emergency alerts when a vehicle is involved in an accident.

PSA Peugeot Citroën, BMW and Volvo have systems on the market, while Mercedes-Benz is poised to provide a service as standard on its C-Class range from the end of 2008. The Mercedes solution, which links to the driver's mobile phone, is being developed with the German safety foundation Björn Steiger Stiftung (BSS).

BSS is also working with Volkswagen and Audi, and has ambitions to establish a pan-European eCall service for all manufacturers from 2009. SBD considers this to be a credible alternative to the EC public eCall proposal, and it could gain sufficient momentum to become the de facto European standard. It would, however, depend on sufficient support from countries that have already committed to the EC concept.

Conclusion

Business models are key to the deployment of eCall, and there is no resolution yet on who will pay for in-vehicle equipment, nor how the ongoing services will be funded. This lack of clarity has led to a reduced commitment from vehicle manufacturers and mobile phone network operators to the Commission's program.

While the EC's public eCall service is delayed by debates over the technical and business model issues, there's a real prospect that the private services implemented by vehicle manufacturers could make the EC's troubled initiative redundant.

SBD believes that eCall **will** happen in Europe, and expects a number of private solutions to emerge. In parallel to this, the development of the EC's public solution will continue and SBD expects that a small number of countries may deploy the necessary infrastructure by 2010.

David McClure is director of ITS and telematics at SBD. Since the inception of EC's eCall activities in 2001, SBD has been at the forefront of eCall with technical research and market intelligence. SBD has also worked closely with vehicle manufacturers and suppliers on client-focused workshops to help those stakeholders obtain a competitive advantage in the market.

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