

Driving Forward Europe's Intelligent Car Initiative

Information and Communications technologies are on track towards making a contribution to Europe's ambitious target to cut by 50% the number of fatalities on its roads by the year 2010. So reported Commissioner Viviane Reding at the opening of this year's Intelligent Car Initiative Event, which was held at the MOV'EO Test Track in Versailles on 18 September 2007.

Commissioner Reding also mentioned however, that much more needs still to be done, not only to secure the achievement of this goal, but also to address the challenges posed by the continuing growth in road transport in Europe, particularly with respect to cutting carbon dioxide emissions from vehicles, tackling road congestion, and reducing the number of road accidents.

Speaking in the presence of the Portuguese Minister for Public Works, Transport and Communications, Mr Mário Lino Soares Correia; the French Minister for Higher Education and Research, Mme Valerie Pécresse; and Mr Etienne Pinte, Member of the French National Assembly and Mayor of Versailles; Commissioner Reding introduced the new Communication on the Intelligent Car Initiative, adopted by the European Commission on 17th September 2007. Senior executives from industry were also present on the podium, namely: Professor Bharat Balasubramanian, Vice President of Group Research and Advanced Engineering at DaimlerChrysler; Dr Rémi Kaiser, Chief Executive Officer of Delphi France; and Mr David Ward, Director General of FIA Foundation. Listening was an audience of key representatives from interested organisations across Europe, as well as a host of international delegates from the United States, Japan, South Korea, and China. The meeting was chaired by Mr Fabio Colasanti, Director General for Information Society and Media.

Reviewing the first 18 months since the launch of the European Intelligent Car Initiative, Commission Reding reported that the initiative has become an international reference for addressing the complex issues raised by modern road transportation. Much has been achieved in the period, with the eCall initiative primed for operational phase, a European Code of Practice proposed for the development and testing of Advanced Driver Assistance Systems, and a recommendation for Human Machine Interfaces adopted, with several other activities on-going. With respect to research, efforts in the area of in-vehicle preventative and active safety systems continue to be supported, with work on Co-operative Systems being intensified, and the new challenge of Field Operational Testing of safety systems being progressively addressed. In total, 105 m€ will be invested in Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) research in the area of intelligent vehicle systems over the first calls of FP7.

The Communication addresses eCall and the Commissioner noted with pleasure that the European Parliament had given its full support to eCall and had asked all stakeholders to take the necessary actions for implementing this immediately. The Commissioner urged those Member States yet to sign the eCall *Memorandum of Understanding* to do so as quickly as possible, stating that, "all Member States should sign by the end of 2007."

Describing actions that will be taken to implement eCall, Commissioner Reding reported that the European Commission aims to bring about a voluntary agreement with the automotive industry to include eCall as standard option in all new vehicles from 2010. However, if voluntary agreement cannot be reached the possibility of a mandatory requirement has not been ruled out.

The new Communication proposes actions in three areas: Safer Cars; Cleaner Cars; and Smarter Cars. The first of these not only encompasses eCall, but also Electronic Stability Control (ESC), which has the potential, if all cars were fitted with ESC, to save 4000 lives each year and to avoid 100,000 serious accidents. Availability of ESC however, is, at the moment, very patchy across the Member States. This is a critical issue that will have to be addressed, if, as the Communication proposes, 100% availability in all Member States is to be achieved by 2012. Additionally there are also many other emerging ICT-based preventative and active safety systems that have a significant potential to reduce accidents, but measures will have to be taken to improve the take-up of these technologies, otherwise the penetration rates are expected to remain low.

The second action area, Cleaner Cars, aims to tackle the environmental challenges of the growing use of vehicles in Europe. In particular, this action will address using ICT systems to improve energy efficiency and to reduce emissions. ICTs have a significant potential to contribute towards achieving these goals, and once the eSafety Forum produces a methodology to quantify the impact of ICT on carbon dioxide reduction in road transport, the European Commission will initiate an assessment of the role of ICT and intelligent cars in relation to the Community's climate change objectives.

The third action area, Smarter Cars, will focus on Co-operative Systems, through further support for research in this important area. This will contribute towards realising the potential benefits that such systems offer in terms of reduced environmental impacts and alleviating congestion. Ultimately it is intended that Cooperative Systems will be the subject of Field Operational Testing.

The Intelligent Car Initiative Event was hosted by the European Integrated Project, PReVENT, which was demonstrating the final results of four years of research and development work in the area of preventative and active safety systems.

Mr Mário Lino Soares Correia, Portuguese Minister for Public Works, Transport and Communications mentioned that some people doubted the effectiveness of European Research programmes, accusing these of being distant from ordinary citizens. However, he noted that the research results on show at the event proved that such doubters were wrong; European collaborative research does deliver tangible results for improving the quality of life of Europe's citizens. He also noted that road safety will be one of the main priorities during the course of the Portuguese Presidency.

Mme Valerie Pécresse, French Minister for Higher Education and Research, commented that road safety was a global issue and that addressing this matter at an EU level brings together interested parties which enriches the research. "It is," she said, "the only way to achieve the ambitious goals that have been set."

The PReVENT Integrated Project was co-ordinated by DaimlerChrysler and Professor

Bharat Balasubramanian speaking on behalf of DaimlerChrysler said that managing such a large-scale ambitious project was challenging, nevertheless the effort had been worthwhile. Standardisation of enabling technologies across manufacturers is extremely important and precompetitive collaborative research is the way to achieve such standardisation. Moreover, such research is an important driver for innovation and enables the exploration of high-risk technologies that have significant potential social benefits.

This perspective is shared by Dr Rémi Kaiser, of Delphi France, who stressed the importance of a common sense approach to avoid the proliferation of competing enabling technologies. The place to compete is at the product level and the enabling technologies for preventative and active safety systems developed in the PReVENT project would play an important role in Delphi's future safety related products.

Mr David Ward, FIA Foundation, added that in parallel with the product developments that would take place in the course of the automotive industry's exploitation of the PReVENT results, actions would also need to be taken to stimulate demand for road safety, which means that more will need to be done to create public awareness of the benefits of preventative and active safety systems.

In concluding the meeting, Mr. Fabio Colasanti, Director General for Information Society and Media, observed that the PReVENT project had clearly raised expectations with regard to achievements to be expected from future research. Commissioner Reding also noted that excellent work had been undertaken by the PReVENT Integrated Project and that the results achieved were at the core of the Intelligent Car Initiative. "PReVENT's achievements," she concluded, "would certainly help to bring intelligent vehicle systems closer to the market and hence closer to the citizens of Europe."