

Panel session – NRAs and digital (road) infrastructure for future mobility

DIGITAL TRANSPORT DAYS

9 October 2019 - Helsinki, Finland

Moderator:

- Steve Phillips, Conference of European Directors of Roads - CEDR

Speakers:

- Krista Huhtala-Jenks, MaaS Global
- Sabine Kuehschelm, Director of Infrastructure and Traffic Safety, Ministry of Transport and Innovation (BMViT), Austria
- Joost Vantomme, Smart Mobility Director, European Automobile Manufacturers' Association – ACEA
- Geraldine Walsh, Transport Infrastructure Ireland, Ireland
- Eetu Pilli-Sihvola, Chief Adviser: Automated driving, Finnish Transport and Communications Agency Traficom, Finland
- Kimmo Kiiski, Senior Transport Adviser, Ministry of Transport and Communications, Finland

Introduction

The panel session brought together public and private actors from the road transport sector. The challenges and opportunities of digitalisation for National Road Administrations (NRA's), and the consequences for digital and physical infrastructure managers were addressed.

In this context, the session focused on the following questions:

- a. is the overall role of NRAs to follow or lead?
- b. should NRAs have responsibility for the societal and environmental effects of roads and therefore have access to the tools necessary to manage them?
- c. will digitalisation improve road safety and how will any potential risks and adverse effects be avoided?
- d. what are the expectations of NRAs with regards to road congestion?
- e. do NRAs listen to private and commercial road users enough?

Main summary

- a. Panellists highlighted that NRAs have a leading role in keeping the infrastructure in good condition but their role goes beyond that. Even if NRA's leave mobility services to others, they need a close cooperation to facilitate the provision of such (private sector) services. The panel concluded that in any

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case, NRAs need a holistic approach to mobility services based on the provision of both physical and digital infrastructure.

- b. Participants agreed that the responsibility for the societal and environmental effects of roads should be a joint effort between NRAs and different actors. These effects concern a wide variety of topics such as road safety and sustainability (noise, water and air quality, soils, biodiversity etc.). In this context, the new digital tools to manage the effects should be widely available and commonly shared.
- c. Panellists shared the view that digitalisation is no panacea but an opportunity which needs to be approached wisely and managed well. Otherwise, the potential risks and adverse effects might be too high. Participants also stressed that digitalisation is a broad term which includes many elements such as automation, cyber security, AI etc. These elements need to be clearly defined as their expected effects are totally different.
- d. Concerning the EC's estimate that the cost of road congestion in the EU is 270M€, participants agreed that although road congestion costs are primary related to urban areas, congestion is also present in motorways and NRAs and other actors should now find new digital ways of managing traffic. This needs to be combined with significant improvements in the predictability of journeys for transport users.
- e. Participants recognised the progress on cooperation but also emphasised the need for NRAs to engage with private and commercial road users more often and on a more substantial basis.

Conclusion

The panel concluded that digitalisation will influence many different aspects of land transport, such as traffic operations (connected driving), integrated network management (intramodality) and management of infrastructure (BIM and IoT). Digitalisation will also heavily affect the relation between land transport providers and users (e.g. social media and data transparency). It is therefore essential for NRAs to develop a harmonised European digital infrastructure that will help them have a leading role and harvest the potential benefits.