

Joint UNECE-Belgium Workshop on Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS)

“Towards a new transportation culture: technology innovations for safe, efficient and sustainable mobility”

November, 17th at 9:30
Diamant Centre, Bd. A. Reyers 80, Brussels

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Ladies and gentlemen,

A joint UNECE-Belgium Workshop on safe, efficient and sustainable mobility? This cannot be simply a coincidence. Indeed, Belgium has a long tradition of active support to the UNECE and the global role this organization plays in the field of transport and mobility. Several civil servants from the Federal Public Service are especially active in the working groups, involved in important roles, making concrete regulatory proposals, and by doing so, they are shaping international transport policy. For the last few years, this commitment has been reinforced by the posting of a transport attaché to the permanent representation of Belgium in Geneva.

In Geneva we have a strong partnership for the development of international regulations to equip road transport for the needs of our time. In Brussels, this cooperation has led to the organization of this workshop.

This is the first conference organized by the Federal Public Service on this theme and our aims are twofold. Firstly, this is another way to contribute to the development of international regulations in Geneva. But secondly, this conference sends a strong signal in our country to the stakeholders with whom we permanently collaborate: that the evolution of safe, efficient and sustainable mobility automatically implies ITS.

After all, transport and mobility raise quite some political challenges. The number of road accident victims needs to further reduce. The ideal of 'vision zero' remains the ultimate goal. The trend is certainly positive, due to measures such as automated controls and the many creative awareness-raising campaigns by the Belgian Road Safety Institute. Zero fatalities will probably not be achieved during my term as a Minister, but I do hope to hear such an announcement in my lifetime. To achieve this, the driver should be largely supported by technology.

Belgium certainly still has a lot of work to do to address the problems of congestion and traffic pollution. Likewise, this would be an impossible task without technological innovations.

However, in my view, ITS is not just a means of combatting the harmful side-effects of transport, but ITS will also contribute to supporting the economy. On the one hand, ITS applications may make road transport more efficient through their impact on the traffic flow and on better controlling cargo movement. On the other hand, this sector offers opportunities for companies that develop and commercialize such products. Quite a few of these Belgian companies are members of Agoria and ITS Belgium, which are known for their flourishing operations.

For me, this is the bottom line: **safe, efficient and sustainable mobility cannot happen without ITS.**

Now, what will my contribution be in all this?

Firstly, by providing a customized regulatory framework. This is a task for the different policy levels: the inter- or supra-national, including UNECE, national, regional (the three regions in Belgium have many powers) and potentially also local. As far as I am concerned, at a Belgian level, I will continually evaluate the legislation in force to support technological developments, in consultation with the regions. Examples are, as mentioned in the coalition agreement: the alcohol lock and two applications that will be discussed thoroughly later on in this workshop: Intelligent Speed Adaptation (ISA) and driverless cars. Therefore, this workshop will hopefully lead to insights for further work within UNECE. On that basis I will prepare the necessary legal framework to implement these technological innovations in traffic.

Secondly, the purpose of such legislation is of course based around creating possibilities for progress to be made in the field, in this case: on the road. The path on which these technological developments will find their application is determined by the economic realities (the cost-benefit ratio), but also by the way policy supports technological developments and innovation. For example, in our country we have seen that it is not enough to create a well-founded legal framework for the alcohol lock. There must also be the right conditions for it to be implemented.

Some innovations are still in a development phase and the necessary conditions should be provided to be able to test in concrete deployment situations, backed up by a permanent test center (which could be named a "mobility laboratory"). Other ITS applications are already more mature and if their usage remains low, it is up to the Government to work with the industry and the target market to consider how their deployment can be supported. That again is a task for each policy level, from the local to the European Union.

My administration will be setting up a platform for the road safety of vehicles, one of the main objectives being to promote ITS applications. Together with stakeholders, the levers will be identified to promote the use of new vehicle technologies.

So, for the Federal Public Service Mobility and Transport this workshop marks the start of collaboration with other Governments and the private sector in

order to facilitate development and deployment of ITS applications. An appropriate regulatory framework and encouraging implementation is the double track that I will take with my administration.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank the UNECE for this excellent cooperation. Such initiatives as this joint event are important, I am looking forward to hearing about the conclusions and I am glad to have been able to give you this welcome message.

I wish you a fruitful two-day workshop of presentations, debates and reflection on the themes that will shape the new transport culture.