

## **European Road Safety Day, 9 May 2014: *Safe and smart infrastructure***

### **Main conclusions:**

- **The Safe System approach provides a useful set of principles that should be applied more broadly.**
- **Road user behaviour is a key factor in road traffic and should be addressed by e.g. enforcement of rules, driver education, road design and ITS applications.**
- **Protecting vulnerable road users should be a priority in order to decrease the fatalities among these road users by the same rate as car driver fatalities.**
- **Urban areas have least road safety progress; the intelligent transport systems and smart in-vehicle safety systems can be of particular use to counter this trend.**

On 9 May 2014, the Commission organised the sixth European Road Safety Day in Athens. The topic of the full-day conference was "Safe and smart infrastructure". The event was co-organised with the Greek EU Presidency. Some 270 participants, mostly policy makers and road safety experts from NGOs, the industry and the Member States took part in the conference.

In addition to the conference itself, a road safety exhibition was organised with information stands and road safety simulators. Twelve road safety organisations from Greece and the EU took part in the exhibition, displaying their work to the conference participants.

The event opened with a video message by Mr Siim Kallas, Vice-President of the European Commission. Mr Kallas stressed the success of the infrastructure safety management principles - the motorways where these principles are mandatorily applied are today the safest, in spite of high traffic volumes and high speeds. The question is how similar wins can now be achieved on the rest of the road network.

The two introductory speakers, Mr Nikolaos Stathopoulos, Secretary General of the Ministry of Infrastructure, Transport and Networks and Mr Stratos Simopoulos, Secretary General of Public Works of the Ministry of Infrastructure, Transport and Networks, then greeted the participants and shared some messages on the complexity of road safety work in general and the initiatives taken in Greece in particular. The different challenges for road safety on the different parts of the road network – urban, rural and motorways – were especially emphasised.

The conference continued with two round-tables on specific topics. The first covered a future-oriented perspective on how to push the development towards safer and smarter infrastructure.

Mr Szabolcs Schmidt, Head of the European Commission road safety unit, introduced the topic and invited the speakers to share their ideas and analysis.

Mr Kallistratos Dionelis, Secretary-General of ASECAP shared some comments from the road managers' perspective: what are the main problems and main needs for safer infrastructure. He stressed the role of infrastructure management and the importance of constant maintenance in order to keep the roads safe and competitive.

This was followed by an intervention by Professor Horst Schulze, Chairman of the Forum of European Road Safety Research Institutes, who discussed safe roads with a view to the road users' needs - for example self-explaining roads that make it easy for driver to follow the rules

and behave safely, even when going abroad. He clarified the link between the design of roads and the behaviour of road users, showing that these topics are intertwined and should be addressed as such by policy makers.

Professor George Kanellaidis from the National Technical University of Athens provided some inputs about the need for linking Greek and European road safety efforts. He made a strong case for implementing more widely the Safe System approach and for bringing road safety more clearly up to EU level of decision making. He also proposed the setting up of a European Road Safety Agency.

The following discussion between the panellists and the audience covered issues such as safety of vulnerable road users, ways to improve driver education and training, the lack of reliable road safety data for evidence-based work and the proper division of responsibility between the EU, the Member States and the local authorities.

The chair concluded that infrastructure safety contributes to the overall safety situation and that the EU cannot afford not to prioritise infrastructure safety – the costs of traffic accidents are too high.

The second roundtable focused on the specific question of intelligent transport systems (ITS) and co-operative systems for smart and safe urban mobility.

Professor George Giannopoulos, Director of the Hellenic Institute of Transport, Chairman of the European Conference of Transport Research Institutes and Chairman of the European Transport Research Alliance, opened the panel with a presentation on main elements of safe and smart mobility and the main issues for further development of the modern road safety technologies. He argued that a systemic approach is needed and explained how intelligent safety technology would benefit not only car occupants but also elderly and disabled, among others.

Mr Antonio Avenoso, Executive Director of the European Transport Safety Council, provided some facts and figures on road safety in urban areas, arguing for the use of certain smart technologies that would be of great help to improve safety for especially the vulnerable road users. The case was made in particular for Intelligent Speed Assistance, because it could help keep speeds down also in the low-speed zones where small speed differences can have grave consequences due to the frequent interaction between motorised and non-motorised road users. He stressed that ITS is not a road safety panacea but a complement to traditional road safety measures.

Ms Natalia de Estevan-Ubeda, head of ITS Policy and Strategy at Transport for London, shared experiences from London and explained why this was not only a local challenge but an issue to discuss on EU level. She linked ITS instruments to enforcement of traffic rules, emphasising the need to design safety technologies to adapt driver behaviours to the better. Issues to be addressed for further improvements include public acceptance and the development of the most user-friendly road user interfaces.

The ensuing discussion with the audience included questions on distracted road users, on the challenges of data access and data protection and the problems of some road users consciously breaking the rules rather than simply being uninformed.

Mr Szabolcs Schmidt concluded that it seems that the low-hanging fruits are gone so more efforts are now needed. Four main messages came out especially clear during the day:

- The Safe System approach provides a useful set of principles that should be applied more broadly. The Safe System takes into account the vulnerability of the human body, the crash energies at a collision determining the severity of the crash outcome and the fact that even experienced drivers can make errors. For the infrastructure, this means that roadsides should be designed and maintained in a way that helps drivers to make the right choices and in a way that minimises the impact of those crashes that could not be avoided. For ensuring that roads are safely constructed and maintained in this way, the principles of Directive 2008/96/EC on infrastructure safety management provide some guidance: e.g. the application of safety audits, safety inspections and black-spot mapping of the road network.
- The road user behaviour is the most important factor in road traffic. Road users make errors, sometimes consciously and sometimes not. Road safety is therefore to a large degree about changing driver behaviours, as well as cyclist and pedestrian behaviours, for increased safety. The main tools for doing this are enforcement of rules together with education and awareness campaigns. In addition, road design and modern technologies including ITS applications can help road users to choose the safer way.
- Cars are becoming increasingly safe but the numbers of vulnerable road users killed do not decrease at the same rate. Protecting vulnerable road users should therefore be a priority. Infrastructure, especially in urban areas, should be designed to increase the safety of pedestrians and cyclists.
- As was pointed out during the conference, least road safety progress is seen in the urban areas. Speed management is a key issue in this regard, noticing that ETSC reports that 30-50% of drivers in urban areas exceed the speed limits. Urban areas also often provide complex traffic situations with a mix of cars and vulnerable road users. In such environments, the intelligent transport systems and smart in-vehicle safety systems can be of particular use. Emergency braking and intelligent speed assistance are two examples of applications mentioned in the conference.

Mr Michalis Papadopoulos, Deputy Minister of Infrastructure, Transport and Networks closed the conference with a presentation on work done by the Greek Transport Ministry stressing lifelong learning, enforcement and new initiatives such as the roll-out of e-Call. The Greek national road safety strategy was briefly presented. In his closing speech Mr Papadopoulos also summarised main messages from the informal council that took place on the previous day, emphasising the need for a multitude of actions on enforcement, development of new technologies and maintenance of the infrastructure network.