



Safe and secure?

Patrick Asimus provides a review of road safety proposals in the framework of the forthcoming French presidential elections

Next year France will have a new president and all candidates are therefore invited to take a position regarding road safety in our country.

Every year road accidents cause more than 3,600 fatalities and over 5,000 injuries in France. Furthermore in 2016 road fatalities increased by 3.1 per cent compared to the previous year. Notwithstanding, this situation is more or less the same across Europe so the time has come to define a new vision on road safety that goes beyond the mere enforcement of a repressive arsenal that is proving ineffective. But what are the alternatives on the table?

The French Road Equipment Union (Syndicat des Équipements de la Route, SER) comprises over 60 companies, 5,000 employees and a cumulated turnover of €1.5 billion, has recently made some interesting proposals for improving road safety through a *White Paper on Road Safety*.

From a user perspective, transport infra-

structures should offer the highest safety and security levels that technological progress to date allows. However, it is a fact that police accident reports seldom include any reference to the quality of the infrastructure surrounding a road accident that has resulted in fatalities or severe injuries.

Without such information, and infrastructure being one of the three contributing factors to an accident (the other two being driver behaviour and the vehicle itself), it becomes very difficult to understand with any degree of precision the actual causes of any accident. But today 52 per cent of French citizens consider that the quality of road infrastructures has degraded in France over the last few years (*source: Opinion Way study*).

BETTER KNOW THE NETWORK BEFORE IMPLEMENTING ITS MAINTENANCE

Another important proposal put forward by the SER is to elaborate the annual road

mapping of all road safety equipment installed in French roads, in order to better plan ahead the replacement of devices with more than 20 years in service.

A review of the current French network has revealed that over 50 per cent of road markings do not meet European standard requirements. Furthermore, half of the road network does not have any road markings at all, and 30 to 40 per cent of the traffic signs have exceeded their life cycle and therefore are consequently ineffective.

SAFE MOBILITY FOR OLDER CAR USERS

Another proposal raised in the SER White Paper is to devote additional efforts towards the population segment above 65 years, which represents 14 per cent of all road fatalities in France. Some 90 per cent of drivers aged 65 or more are using their car every day, but these drivers recognise well-maintained traffic signs at a distance of 65 metres, while a 20-year-old person



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would see it at 100 metres. In this context, road safety equipment should be adapted to meet the needs of older car users.

INFRASTRUCTURE BECOMES SMART

The Smart Transportation Alliance (STA) is cross-fertilising industry and academia to bring the Smart Transportation Infrastructures of the Future to reality. The STA community has highlighted that innovation in the transport sector as a whole has been usually driven by safety. Either individual events (like maritime or aviation incidents) or soaring road death figures have led decision-makers to new safety regulations and stimulated innovation.

Road infrastructures are changing this trend by anticipating risks, but further progress must be made in relation to advanced safety technologies that bring early warning and protection to all road users. Today solutions acting directly on the road infrastructure itself are gaining ground, as they bring the advantage of a rapid implementation

that derives in immediate social benefits.

Yet the ‘Smart Roads’ concept is not clear for everyone. A new generation of infrastructures equipped with intelligent systems, anti-icing asphalt pavements, safe poles for lighting columns, and high-quality guardrails, traffic signs and road markings is an integral part of this novel concept. The road sector faces a major challenge at the beginning of the 21st century: making smart roads a reality.

A critical point in this regard is the financing of road infrastructure maintenance. Between 2012 and 2014, the budget for the preservation of road assets in France decreased by €60 million - this kind of policy is exactly what leads to an outmoded and unsafe road network.

HIGHLY EDUCATED ROAD AUTHORITIES LEAD TO SAFETY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Moreover, and due to the budgetary cuts above, numerous professionals specialising in road maintenance are retiring, with

the unfortunate side effect that their know-how and practice is lost to the sector as a whole. A solution to this problem is securing an adequate level of training for road authorities and manufacturers, so they gain sufficient knowledge on subjects such as the EN standards, their implementation on French roads, best practices, providing an even level of safety, and so on.

In this regard, and with the objective of facilitating the exchange of international good practice connected to the methods, technologies and standards associated to transport infrastructures, the STA Certified Training Programmes (<http://smart-transportation.org/training/>) are ‘knowledge transfer’ courses specifically designed for mobility professionals, both in the private and the public sectors.

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