Autonomous driving in European transport

2018/2089(INI) - 05/12/2018 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Transport and Tourism adopted the own-initiative report by Wim van de CAMP (EPP, NL) on autonomous driving in European transport.

The Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection, exercising its prerogative as an associated committee in accordance with Article 54 of the Rules of Procedure, also gave its opinion on the report.

The EU strategy on connected and automated mobility is closely linked to the Commission's political priorities. The report stressed that the EU should encourage and further develop digital technologies for automated mobility to offset human error and reduce traffic incidents and road fatalities.

Automation levels exist, levels 1 and 2 already being on the market, but the conditional, high and full automation levels (when a vehicle becomes self-driving - level 3) are expected to become available only in 2020-2030.

It is key for Europe to stay at the forefront of this field, in order to reap the benefits of automated road transport and to successfully compete with the enormous thrust of efforts elsewhere in the US, China or Japan.

Road transport

Members underlined the importance of adopting an ambitious new General Safety Regulation for motor vehicles. They called for clear legislation that is regularly reviewed, updated and harmonised, obligating the installation of event data recorders in line with the revised General Safety Regulation in order to improve accident investigations and to clarify and enable the tackling, as soon as possible, of issues of liability.

Members called on the Commission to:

- reach a common position, with the Member States, and to cooperate in order for the EU to take and maintain a leading role in the international technical harmonisation of automated vehicles within the framework of the UNECE and the Vienna Convention;

- ensure that all systems that include digitally communicated road traffic information are interoperable;

- pay particular attention to data protection, vehicle and route data use, and cyber security;

- lay down clear ethical guidelines for artificial intelligence.

Air transport

Members urged the Commission to present without delay detailed rules for automated aircraft given that a single unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), and operational approach is not appropriate to ensure the safe integration of automated aircraft into airspace shared with manned aircraft. UAVs will need safe, and where appropriate, certified intelligence systems, as well as a specific air space management environment.

Suitable test areas for autonomous aircraft technologies, including drones, should be created in order to provide safe conditions for simulating new technological solutions before their final implementation.

Waterborne transport

The report called on the Commission to:

- define the levels of automation for both inland and sea navigation and common standards, including for ports, in order to harmonise and stimulate the uptake of autonomous vessels in interaction with automated and non-automated users and infrastructure;

- develop a comprehensive strategy with the aim of stimulating further automation in inland shipping, its infrastructure, fairways and traffic management and the development of automated ports.

Rail transport

The Commission is called on to continue the Shift2Rail programme with a view to providing for further developments towards a digital rail network and fully automated train operation, including the development of cybersecurity.

Research and educational needs

Members stressed the need to develop key autonomous technologies in the EU to keep up with global competition and create new jobs.

Members urged the Commission to:

- propose initiatives promoting the skills, education and training needed to keep the EU at the forefront of the autonomous transport sector. They recommended that research and innovation programmes be continued and extended for all modes of transport in the next multiannual financial period for 2021-2027 (Horizon Europe);

- establish a Joint Undertaking along the same lines as Shift2Rail for rail transport and CleanSky for the aeronautics industry, so as to create an industry-driven strategic initiative on autonomous transport.