

FIA conference:

Developing safe, efficient and connected mobility

Keynote speech by Vice-President Siim Kallas

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Brussels

Ladies and gentlemen,

Road transport has seen some amazing developments - from when the internal combustion engine was invented in the late 19th century to today's cars which can almost drive themselves.

Technologies for driver comfort are improving. Roads are getting better and safer. Numbers of road deaths in Europe are falling. So there is plenty of cause to celebrate.

Last year, some 28,000 people died on European roads. This is still far too many, but it's also much fewer than ten years ago.

Road safety is one of Europe's big success stories. Both policy makers and road safety organisations have played a part in this.

And so, of course, has the vehicle industry itself – it is always looking to make improvements. For better safety systems, for smarter safety devices.

Today's cars are driven by human beings. There are many 5-star drivers on the roads. Unfortunately, none of us is perfect or immortal. There will always be new drivers who have not yet much experience. And even an excellent driver can make mistakes.

Technology can assist these drivers and help to prevent mistakes. Technology can be an excellent tool in driver training.

But it can also be a distraction. The answer is not to prohibit technology, but to discuss properly how to minimise any distractions.

How we can promote the good use of ITS while limiting the negative effects? I invite you all to reflect creatively on this together with the Commission.

Smart cars will also require smart and safe roads. In the future, roads will need to be able to "communicate" with vehicles.

Smart and safe infrastructure is therefore an important area for investment.

The Connecting Europe Facility will enable us to enhance our present support for new technologies and innovation as well as for telematics applications systems and services across transport modes, such as ITS for the road sector.

The challenge is clearly to move beyond the big TEN-T corridors.

Most fatal road crashes happen on secondary rural roads – which is where the next improvements are needed.

So I am pleased to see that many EU Member States already use the motorway safety management principles on their national roads as well.

The 5-star roads will also be a main topic for the informal transport Council in May.

In the meantime, let's all put on our “thinking caps” to come up with bright ideas and new safety inventions for the Transport Ministers to look at.

Finally, let's not forget a 5-star emergency response.

It is important to try to prevent road traffic crashes from happening at all. But if they do, the victims must be well and quickly cared for.

In June, the Commission made two proposals to ensure that, by October 2015, new type-approved cars will automatically call emergency services in the event of a serious crash and eCalls will be handled efficiently in the emergency call centres in all Member States.

This proposal is now being discussed by the European Parliament and Council.

Ladies and gentlemen

Today's conference will touch upon several exciting issues. Some of you might be hesitant, some will be optimistic about the new ideas and innovations presented.

But remember that technology is neither good nor evil. It will be what we make out of it. The challenge is to foresee both the potential benefits and the potential risks. And then deal with them.

Where technical developments can clearly improve road safety, they should be promoted.

I am relying on everyone involved in road safety to contribute to this work. Because every death is one too many!

Thank you.