LowCVP's Andy Eastlake

Efficient, intelligent and autonomous – can new technologies change the outlook for transport carbon?

Hardly a day goes by without more news about autonomous, automated or 'intelligent' vehicles and how they are going to transform future mobility. Certainly new technology is already changing the way people move around: witness the dramatic growth of Uber in London and many other cities, the introduction of BMW's Drive Now and Bolloré Group's Bluecity electric car sharing scheme which are following in some of the tracks laid by Liftshare, now one of the 'grandparents' of one branch of the 'new mobility'.

But what will the impacts of these potentially dramatic changes in the way we will be moving around have on carbon emissions and local pollution, and how should policy makers be responding to the opportunities and challenges? And what might the impacts be in terms of fleet ownership and management?

Certainly increased autonomy and increased vehicle utilisation – facilitated by new information technologies, including smartphones – have great potential to improve efficiency in how we move around. We should be able to service our mobility requirements with fewer vehicles, operating more efficiently. But could there be possible down-sides too? If we no longer had to drive the car to work (because it drives itself) and could catch up with our emails en route, would we drive our cars more, for example?

The LowCVP has asked the Institute for Transport Studies at Leeds University to prepare a 'thinkpiece' to help open up the discussion on these sort of questions and provide some early suggestions as to how policy makers might want to plan for a future in which new technologies enable us to maximise emissions improvements. Their paper will be presented at the LowCVP Conference on 30 June at the Olympic Park in London and a short print version published alongside.

It is key, of course, that wherever vehicles are on the 'autonomous spectrum' and however their operation is managed, that they operate with the best available and cleanest technology. Electric power is clearly set to be one of the main propulsion solutions of the future. But what impact is the growing demand from electric vehicles going to have on the UK's powergrid? What can be done to minimise the costs of this big transformation?

The Energy Technology Institute has been wrestling with some of these questions in producing their Consumers, Vehicles and Energy Integration (CVEI) project and this will be a focal point for expert discussion on 30 June. The event will also focus on how UK 'plc' is placed to benefit from the low carbon automotive and related technologies of the future and look at technology options for other road transport sectors where electrification is not such a practical option. I hope to see you there.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The LowCVP Conference takes place on 30 June at Here East, Olympic Park, London. It is held in association with 'Make the Future London', a festival of ideas and innovation, where a drinks reception will be held after the Conference. More details and bookings: www.lowcvp.org.uk/events/conference16