



Into the future

Mobility Conference Week's final keynote speech offered up two fascinating views of how the car might develop in the coming decades.

Friday morning of Conference Week 2013 saw delegates treated to two similar but subtly different views of the future of the automobile as Professor David Metz of the Centre for Transport Studies at University College London and José Viegas, Secretary General of the International Transport Forum delivered the event's final keynote address.

Opening the discussion, Professor Metz presented statistics for the UK revealing that car usage in London has seen little or no increase in the past few decades and that most data points to declining automobile use in the city. He presented figures showing that car mileage per year in the city and the number of trip taken are remaining static while other statistics show the population to be rising, with forecasts suggesting an increased from 8m to 10m people by 2040.

"The population is growing, incomes are rising, but car use is not increasing," he said, "and the reason for this is that road capacity is the limiting factor. We haven't built more roads, indeed we have taken away for cars by providing for bus lanes cycles lanes." He also pointed to a decline in car ownership, saying that by 2040 he expects ownership to fall to about 30% of the population, down from 50% in 1990.

What this means for the future of transport, he said, is that cities in particular will be larger and more densely populated but, particularly in developed countries, without the option to build more road infrastructure. In this case, cities will become more reliant on

rail and BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) systems.

Such urban growth would not signal the death knell of the automobile, he said, as the car will continue to be of relevance in suburban and rural areas.

He did, however, say that he believes that the car is a mature technology with little scope for radical development and that even the advent of electric and autonomous cars will have little destructive impact on current modes of transport. He did, however, forecast a growth in the use of electric bicycles and motorcycles due to a decline in the middle class.

In terms of club involvement in this future, Professor Metz championed the idea of clubs becoming involved in systems that traffic management, saying that predictive navigation could become a good revenue stream.

As infrastructure become more and more constrained, the provision of information to alleviate congestion and plot optimum journey schedules and route maps could open up the possibility of auto clubs selling this information on to members.

Professor Metz's view of the automobile as a mature technology with little to more offer in terms of more rapid journey times was slightly at odds with the views expressed by Mr Viegas, who instead sees more technologically advanced cars offering positive opportunities.

He suggested that autonomous cars, which initially might be targeted at safer travel, might, when more pervasive, provide efficient and flexible transport with fast-moving 'platoons' of autonomous vehicles effectively acting as road trains.

Mr Viegas added there will be a transition period in which vehicles of different varieties would be attempting to use the same road space and that this could cause problems. He also said he feels sure consumers will want the option of autonomous driving or manual control, to maintain the 'fun' of driving.

He continued by saying that ownership of such cars would eventually swing towards shared ownership or with shared rights, with packages of time or distance sold to consumers in much the same way mobile phone tariffs work.

This would benefit consumers he said, as it would reduce the cost of use and give them more choice over which vehicle to call depending on the task in hand.

Further benefits would accrue from a switch to such a transport model. "It will lead to a massive release of public space," he said. "I did the number for Lisbon and it is in the order of 10s of square km. In many cities 15-20% of space is reserved for parking. This would be significantly reduced."

In imagining how clubs might adapt to this future, Mr Viegas said that automobile organisations were ideally placed to act as service providers or brokers in this field.

"You can be something like a wholesaler or a mobility provider – you can be the honest broker," he said. "You can evaluate the performance of providers, you could buy service in bulk and negotiate packages for members. You have independence from manufacturers and you have the trust of customers, don't throw it away."



President Todt focus on collective development

President tells Mobility Conference Week that clubs and FIA must work together to meet challenges of the future.

In his closing speech to Mobility Conference Week 2014, FIA President Jean Todt said development of clubs through shared experience is the key to a stronger federation in the future.

"I am encouraged to see that we have 64 countries attending this week, which represents half of the population of the FIA and I have seen a lot of passion and commitment, he said.

He went on to say that the event had encompassed travel in both the past (through the week's gala dinner at the renowned Louwman Museum) and in the future, via the conference theme of 'Connected for the Future'. However, added that this future has a different shape depending on region.

"The reality is different in Africa, the Middle East, Latin and Central America, Asia and Oceania – every region is different and we need to think about clubs around the world that need to adapt themselves to automotive evolution in the next decades."

That will happen, he said, on through joint effort. "We need to share that together,"

he said. "That's what the FIA has to address and we need to do that with you. The most important thing is to find out how we can better work as a team to optimise our operations and establish synergies that help develop your organisations. We can be strong because of you and our duty is to help you to be strong also."

He closed his remarks by thanking Dutch club the ANWB and its President Guido van Woerkom for hosting the event, which coincided with the club's 130th anniversary celebrations.

The theme of collective strength was picked up by Deputy President Mobility Brian Gibbons who said the success of the event could be measured in the new networks established among delegates who had not previously met. This, he said, was part of the true meaning of being connected for the future.

Deputy President Gibbons then brought the event to a close by revealing that next year's conference will be held in Melbourne, Australia, with the event then returning to Region 1 in 2015 when London will host the conference.