

Strategies in getting public and political support for ITS: The use of a demonstration-car and role-models within trials

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ABSTRACT

Many trials are held with ITS in Europe, mostly concerning the drivers' behaviour and acceptance. Nowadays the focus has shifted towards achieving implementation and acceptance of these devices by the general public. In October 2002, an ISA-trial started in Ghent with 37 vehicles. Among the drivers there were test-drivers that could be considered role models. These drivers had a delegating - public function at the council of Ghent, an institution or company and were chosen because they could have influence on the general public, decision and opinion makers. A key-concerning issues is how the public will react if ITS were to be implemented. From the point of view of policymakers, support for policy or measures is an important precondition for success. It is assumed that greater public support would also result in greater support in political and governmental circles and can lead to a better behavioural adaptation by the public.

The use of role-models was meaningful within the communication strategy of the Belgian ISA-trial and resulted in a more public attention for the trial, and the proposition and voting of three resolutions in the Belgian Federal Parliament. Several other municipalities or governmental administration showed interest in different components of ISA like the creation of digital maps, to start up new trials, etc...

KEYWORDS

Intelligent speed adaptation (ISA), speed-warning devices, role-models, public support, acceptance, implementation strategies.

INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades, the importance and popularity of Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) to improve transport and road safety has been growing rapidly.

One of the most promising intelligent transport systems, specifically aimed at reducing inappropriate speed, is Intelligent Speed Adaptation (ISA).

Several trials with different types of ISA have already been done across Europe. In the Netherlands, a mandatory system was tested. The United Kingdom, instead, focused on an advisory system. In Sweden, a range of different types of systems was tested in different cities. In France, a trial was held near Versailles with the involvement of the car-industry.

Within these trials, most of the focus was put on the behavioural changes and acceptance when driving with an ISA-device. The outcome was mostly very promising and the degree of acceptance after experiencing ISA was rather high.

In Belgium a trial with 34 cars and 3 buses equipped with the Active Accelerator Pedal (AAP) concerning these research topics was held. The main difference with other trials was that a certain group was chosen to function as role-models in ISA driving. These role-models were a part of the communication strategy within the trial.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC AND POLITICAL SUPPORT

Until today, it seems that many actors (like policymakers) do not have a clear picture of behavioural, societal, legal, institutional and political aspects regarding the use of ITS, although some of them were studied. Moreover, prepossessions about ITS, general lack of knowledge about the infrastructure needed and social-economical conditions could cause a conservative, risk-avoiding attitude towards new developments in this area and would made implementation almost impossible. Throughout policy perspectives implementation of ITS will indicate other policies and decision-making processes than for traditional enforcement methods. A main issue within implementation strategies is to gather support for the measures.

Public support for road safety (measures) can be described as a positive valuation of road safety and of measures that evidently increase road safety. This positive valuation leads, under favourable conditions, to an increased willingness to accept a measure and even to actively support it.

The growing interest in getting public support must be seen in the increased notion that policymaking acts must be considered as a two-way direction wherein interaction, transaction and communication with the public are the key-elements. This leads, in terms of road safety policy, to the precondition that the effectiveness of a measure will increase if there is support.

This support can be influenced with the use of role-models within the communication-strategies of the ITS – trials.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY WITHIN THE TRIAL

Many ISA-trials were held around the world, concerning the behavioural, acceptability and adaptation aspects by test-drivers. Most of these results are very promising. Concerning the implementation of ISA, Trials are a good instrument to communicate about new aspects within road safety.

To enforce the communication about the ISA-trial in Belgium, some drivers were especially selected to be role-models in ISA-driving. These drivers had a delegating - public function at the council of Ghent, an institution or company. In concrete, the mayor and two aldermen of city of Ghent were selected, the rector and vice-rector of the Ghent University and the CEO of Volvocars Belgium. In this way policy, academic and car-manufacture actors could be influenced.

The need for these role-models is because it was assumed that ISA could have an ‘image-

problem.’ The use of role-models could take some prepossessions away: policy-makers and the manager of a car manufactory were using the system and were giving ‘an example in road-safety.’ The use of ISA by decision-makers also made it more debatable within the public opinion. Also, policy-makers were using it first, before they would implement it.

Another aspect was the involvement of company-cars in the trial: Ghent University, the provincial and the Ghent administration had some cars equipped with the Active Accelerator Pedal. The participation of these companies can give an impulse to the decision makers and could have a role in the safety strategy of companies.

Also a demonstration-car was used within the trial. Giving demonstrations with a car can have more impact than ‘speaking about’ or ‘giving information about’ ISA. To experience driving with ISA, can be more convincible, palpable and makes ISA more accessible.

OUTCOME OF THE COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES DURING THE TRIAL

Before the trial, it was noted that decision-makers, governmental institutions, insurance-companies, the public... were not that much interested in ISA, mostly because they did not have accurate information about these systems. The ISA-trial made some changes about these opinions.

The effect of the demonstration-car

It was noticed that opinion and decision-makers were more approachable if they could use or drive with the demonstration-car. It is also easier to explain the concept and the effects of ISA; takes most of the prepossessions, like ‘ISA restrict the freedom in driving’ and the ‘big brother-effect’ away and makes communication to the general public much easier and effective.

In the last 5 years, more than 350 demonstrations were held: demonstrations given to the press resulted in approximately 25 television reports and at least 50 national newspaper articles. Policy-makers, like the former Belgian prime-minister, Belgian minister of mobility, and representatives for the European and Belgian parliament had experienced ISA. Organisations, national and international research-institutes, several officials from city-administrations, the European Union... had driven with the demonstration-car.

All these demonstrations made ISA well known within different kind of groups.



Figure: Mr. H., Decroo, Chairman of the Belgian Federal Chamber of Representatives.

The use of role-models

In general, the use of role-models during the trial, made the project more interesting among the media like television, newspapers and radio. These interests made ISA better known by the general public, decision and policy-makers, so the support was getting larger.

Specifically, the trial and the positive opinions of these role-models in the public media made companies, authorities (like other cities, governmental administrations), insurance companies, institutions,... more interested in ISA.

The CEO of Volvocars made even a statement about the implementation of ISA on Belgian Television and even wrote a kind of open letter:

“Indeed I was a big supporter of the ISA-project when it started in Ghent. I used it for about one year and believe the technology is promising, although it still was not yet completely reliable. In my view, intelligent speed adapters will find their way to the markets in the near future because there is a growing belief that safety doesn't depend only on the availability of safe cars (Volvo being a perfect example), but also, and even more, on the way these cars are used. This area is larger than the role of the car manufacturers, and it will be society (or the ones who represent society, i.e. the authorities) that will decide on how speed limits will be enforced. In this respect your ISA-system (AAP) is a very welcome first effort in this social debate”.

(Peter Leyman, Managing director Volvo Cars Gent, 2004)

The aldermen and the mayor of Ghent made also the ISA-concept more debatable by policy-makers, which also resulted in further research and possibilities of ISA in Belgium.

The outcome on policy-level

In the Belgian parliament, commissions were formed and resolutions were proposed and voted to enforce the policy about ISA, sometimes lead in by an ISA-demonstration.

In 2002 a resolution in the senate according experiments with speed limit devices for passenger cars was voted.

In May 2004 the resolution regarding according the use of Intelligent Speed Limit Devices by people with a public (role-model) function was accepted in the federal House of Representatives. The purpose of this resolution was to enforce the support on political level and to start up a trial with regional and national politicians.

Also in May 2004 the resolution according the general implementation of devices of Intelligent Speed Adaptation was voted. This proposal could be seen as a base to take further actions on implementation of ISA within a certain period. Also the necessary to take further research actions on public support was described.

For the federal elections (2003), some political parties proposed the implementation of ISA within their programme.

OUTCOME ON FURTHER STRATEGIES AND POLICY-ACTIONS

After the trial, some new initiatives were started or created. Some of these initiatives are still in a pre-start phase, while others are already finished.

An ISA-trial in Brussels?

Related to the outcome of the results and communication of the Ghent trial, plans were made in cooperation with the former Federal minister of mobility B. Anciaux, to start up a new trial in Brussels. Cars of different cabinets, parliaments and ministries will be equipped with the active accelerator pedal. The main goal is to be role-models in traffic safety, to create further carrying capacity in Belgium and to take further steps into implementation of ISA. In a next phase, companies could get involved in the trial and even the cars of the European Parliament. Later, individuals and even more companies can participate.

Until now, a first map of Brussels with the data of the speed-limits is already made in a private-public partnership, and within some trials in Brussels the map was tested.

Because of the change of minister, a few years ago, the further steps into the Brussels project are slowed down.

Initiatives about the creation of a Flemish speed map

Last year a research started to describe the necessary topics for constructing a Flemish speed map: In a first part different kind of literature about speed maps around Europe, and in which European framework (like Speed Alert, ActMap,...) the construction of this map can be done, are described. In a second part the legislation about implementing traffic signs is investigated wherein some necessary legal steps are formulated to create a speed map. The third part of the study describes the results of a questionnaire held by municipalities. These questions were about which information (do they have information and in which form: digital – analogue) they already have and how they see on legal and practical way the use of creation of a digital speed map.

Preliminary conclusion is that about 21% of all municipal roads in Flanders can be found in a digital form. In other words a first base is present to go further with the creation of a complete digital map for the region. Also most municipalities are rather positive for the creation of a digital map.

In a last phase the recommendations and possible strategies to get the involvement of the municipalities are formulated.

The creation of ISAwed.eu

During the trial, many people asked about information of the project. As the site started to give only information about ISA in Belgium, it started more and more as a site to give an overview of the most projects about ISA in the world. In January 2006 the site was completely restyled and since that day, about 5000 unique visitors have viewed 49 000 pages.

In 2007 the site will be restyled again and will be changed by name instead of isaweb.be into isaweb.eu and will be more open site about ISA in the world. In the future some parts would

be made more public and adjustable for research institutes.

Further research on measuring the public acceptance of ISA

In 2005, a PhD-project started within the topic of measuring support of ITS.

The focus of this PhD is defining what is actually meant with 'public support', how it can be measured, what the benefits are of knowing the public support for road safety policy and implementation of ITS. Until now it is noted that there are many methods used to define acceptance of ITS by test-drivers or acceptability by stakeholders. Our definitive outcome must be a technique that could be used for other acceptance studies on ITS.

The target research group are 'the general public.' In a way the question is asked if individuals would support ISA if it would be implemented. In our approach, the interest is more in defining the social aspects that could lead to public support. These social aspects are partly found within individuals' attitudes; attitudes that describe whether a person wants to accept or reject a certain measure. The sum of the degree of acceptance by individuals would indicate if there is public support for the measure or not.

Through literature search, the content of public support will be outlined and the underlying personal and social factors will be described and linked with social behavioural and acceptance theories. This may result in a theoretical framework to develop a model for measuring public support of ITS, especially related to the use of ISA.

Other (possible) initiatives

During the trial some events happened around ISA; like the Belgian Pedestrian Movement which took ISA as a theme within their safety campaigns. Schools get interested in developing ISA-related issues. University students around Flanders asked assistance for their master thesis about different aspects about ISA (from behavioural and technical research to the (aesthetic) design of ISA-systems).

Other cities get also more interested in starting a trial. Until now, besides Ghent, Antwerp and Mechelen shows interest in the development of a digital map and to start with a trial.

Also the province of Limburg shows interest to develop an ISA-environment.

CONCLUSIONS

Implementation of ISA also involves taking into consideration how the public opinion thinks about these future measures. Therefore it is necessary to research the basic attitudes of the public, to know if road-safety in relation to speed is an important social topic and how people think about measures taken against speeding. That way, it might be shown that there is enough support to guarantee acceptance of an implementation strategy.

This is why trials can be very effective to measure the acceptance of ISA-devices. A communication strategy to every partner involved in a project and to the general public will be necessary to come to implementation.

Having a demonstration-car that can be used by different kind of groups, before, during and after a trial, is an easy and effective communication method: it can make ISA more approachable and widespread.

The use of role-models or individuals with a public function in ISA-driving are giving good opportunities for communication in the media and to increase a carrying capacity and acceptance of ISA. Also the use of the active accelerator pedal by policy makers has been appreciated by the public. Nowadays a political climate has formed in Belgium that can make implementation of ISA possible.

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More information can be found on <http://www.isaweb.eu>