



Volvo have announced that they are entering the field of automobiles—autonomous or self-driving vehicles. The seminar, 'Policy Implications of Autonomous Vehicles', focused on the policy opportunities and challenges presented by automobiles.

“Autonomous driving has potential for improving road safety, traffic flow and fuel economy,” said Peter Mertens, Volvo's senior VP of research and development. “To make this happen it is important to avoid a patchwork of various state regulations. Volvo aims to gain leadership in the field of autonomous driving by moving beyond concepts and pioneering technologies that will reach the customers. We already have several driving assistance systems in the pipeline. But the legal situation for this technology still remains unclear. We want to address this by supporting efforts to legalize testing of autonomous systems, as well as initiating a constructive co-operation with policymakers.

Mertens expressed the company's concern that a state-by-state approach in the USA could lead to a patchwork of different laws and regulations. “It is important that the US Government underlines that regulation of motor vehicle safety systems and components is their jurisdiction. NHTSA research on the issues associated with autonomous vehicles could be the first step toward adoption of performance ratings on technology for autonomous driving,” he said. “It is also crucial that state legislation doesn't restrict the use of active safety and support systems. They should be explicitly excluded from the definition of autonomous driving.”

Volvo is already spearheading the development of innovative safety technologies that help drivers avoid accidents. The company's first focus areas in the development of autonomous systems are for slow-moving queues, with a system for traffic jam assistance due to be introduced in 2014. In the long term, it will look at the introduction of the use of road trains on motorways and fully autonomous vehicles.

“Allowing the car to act automatically is crucial when moving towards our vision that future cars will not crash at all,” Mertens added. “Our present systems for auto braking, lane keeping aid and adaptive cruise control could be described as the first steps. Now, we are moving towards technologies with a higher degree of autonomous driving in normal traffic situations.”