

The promise of a new year

In 2014, the ITS industry's vision in many ways became reality



By Tom Kern

In February the U.S. DOT's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) announced that it would begin taking steps to require vehicle-to-vehicle (V2V) communication technology that will significantly reduce the number of crashes on our nation's roadways by enabling real-time communication between vehicles and the world around them.

V2V and vehicle-to-infrastructure (V2I) communication, together known as V2X, represent the next generation of vehicle safety, and are the result of years of collaborative research, development and testing between the auto and high-tech industries and the U.S. DOT.

Over the summer, President Obama delivered remarks at the Turner-Fairbank Highway Research Center in McLean, Va., highlighting his administration's support and commitment to V2X technology for improving safety and mobility and reducing wasted time and fuel on our nation's roads.

Then in the fall, ITS America hosted the 21st World Congress on Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) in Detroit, where industry leaders showcased many of the latest technologies and innovations including advanced automotive and commercial vehicle

safety systems, infrastructure and traffic-management technologies, and next-generation mobility solutions.

The event featured the largest Technology Showcase in ITS World Congress history with more than 30 interactive demonstrations.

The Michigan DOT showed off cutting-edge transportation operations technology by building a live traffic management center right on the exhibit hall floor, and General Motors CEO Mary Barra announced that GM will offer new semi-autonomous driving features and V2V communication capability in some 2017 Cadillacs. Ford Motor Co. Executive Chairman Bill Ford and Verizon Chairman and CEO Lowell McAdam also talked about how their companies are revolutionizing the automotive and transportation industries through innovation.

By any measure, that's a home-run year, but enough looking back. By definition, intelligent transportation is the business of the future, and 2015 is shaping up to be a critical year.

In Washington, D.C., transportation funding will once again take center stage as MAP-21 expires on May 31, 2015, leaving government and industry leaders to search for a permanent and workable funding alternative or supplement to the outdated 18.4-cents-per-gallon gas tax that feeds the federal Highway Trust Fund for infrastructure projects across the country.

2015 marks 22 years since the gas tax was increased. Think about that.

In that same period, the costs of infrastructure repair and construction have skyrocketed, yet funding has remained at 1993 levels.

Put another way, could you and your family be comfortable or even live on a 1993 paycheck? It's obvious that our nation's infrastructure is in trouble.

The U.S. is on the cusp of a

technological revolution that promises to save thousands of lives each year, transforming vehicle and roadway safety, reducing traffic congestion, improving personal mobility, and strengthening America's economic competitiveness.

ITS America is committed to ensuring that the 5.9 GHz band which was set aside for V2V and V2I communication remains free from wi-fi interference. With more than 30,000 deaths on our nation's roads every year, it is critical that efforts to open up additional spectrum do not come at the expense of revolutionary life-saving technologies.

In June of 2015, we'll host the 25th ITS America Annual Meeting and Exposition in a city that in many ways parallels Detroit. Besides being home to my lifelong baseball favorite, the Pirates, Pittsburgh, Pa., was long known as a steel town. But as Forbes Magazine stated in 2011, it has now "become a hub for the tech industry, health care, education and financial services."

I would add that Pittsburgh also is a center for entrepreneurship; it is the second busiest inland port in the nation with easy access to the entire eastern seaboard. Just down the road, Carnegie Mellon University's Traffic21 Institute is spearheading some of the most advanced and exciting ITS research and development on the planet including critical infrastructure improvements, greater transportation access, autonomous vehicle technology and more.

I encourage you to join us at the ITS Annual Meeting as the evolution of our transportation infrastructure network continues. It's going to be a great year for intelligent transportation and just maybe for the Pirates, too. **TM&E**

Kern is interim president and CEO of ITS America.