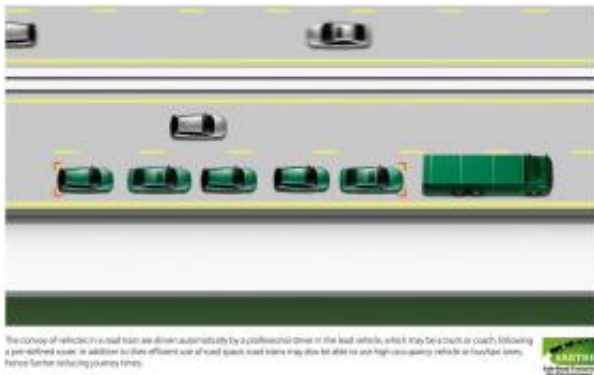


Road trains may be coming soon to Europe (w/ Video)

November 13 2009, by Lin Edwards

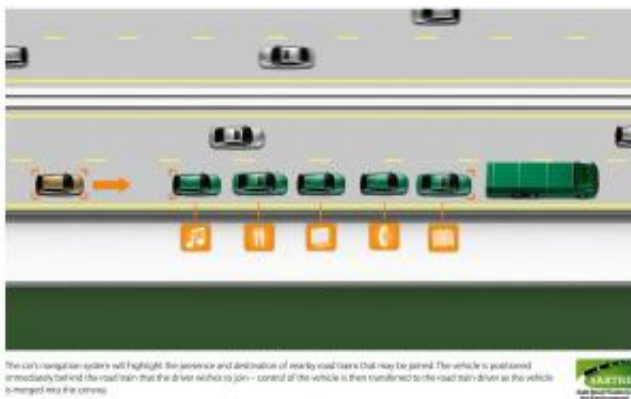


(PhysOrg.com) -- Road trains linking vehicles together in a traveling convoy are planned for Europe. With only the lead vehicle being actively driven, the road trains would allow commuters to sleep, read a book or watch TV, or anything else they fancy as they drive to work.

A research project financed by the EU's Framework 7 plan looked at ways to reduce the cost of traveling along European highways and has suggested the idea of a "road train" that could link up to eight vehicles to a lead vehicle by wireless sensors. The vehicles could be any mix of cars, trucks or buses, but the project focuses on commuters traveling long distances to work. The project is named Sartre, for Safe Road Trains for the Environment.

Early results suggest linking the vehicles and having them travel close together could reduce fuel consumption by around 20% for all the vehicles except the leader. Traveling as a group could also result in a reduction in travel time, fewer accidents and less congestion on the roads. Relaxing, or even sleeping on the way to work could also cut out the stress of driving.

A professional driver (such as a bus or truck driver) in the leading vehicle would be charged with steering and controlling the convoy and monitoring its members. Drivers of the other vehicles could relax, since the leader would be controlling their vehicle.

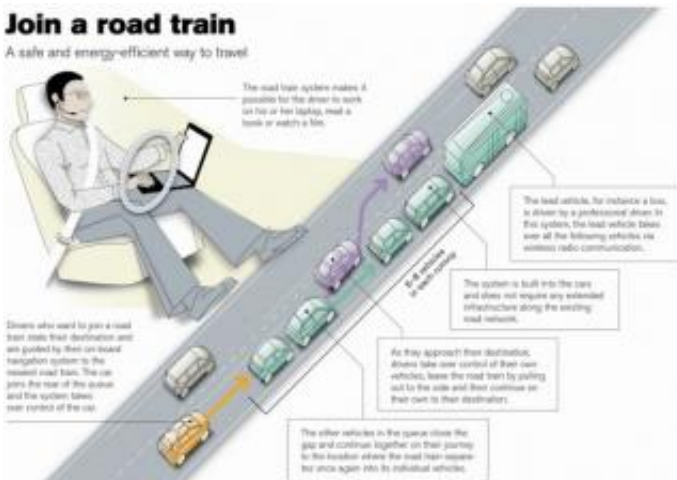


Co-ordinator of the project, Tom Robinson of British Consultancy firm Ricardo, told the BBC that each vehicle joining the road train would have its own control system, communications equipment, and software monitoring system, but the lead vehicle would monitor the entire road train. Vehicles would be able to join by stating their destination and using their navigation system to locate the nearest road train. They could leave it whenever they wished, by signalling the lead vehicle, and then taking control of their own [vehicle](#).

It should be possible to use readily available components to enable vehicles to link up to the road train, and changes to the roads should not be necessary.

The Sartre project will be tested for about three years once the preliminary research on the elements required and on the safety issues is completed. Robinson said that the first platoon of two trucks and three cars will be tested on special tracks in Sweden, the UK, and Spain. Later tests will probably also be carried out on public roads in Spain.

According to Volvo, the first prototypes of the road train could be tested within a couple of years.



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