People not technology will drive success of autonomous vehicles

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The 2016 International Conference on Traffic and Transport Psychology started in Brisbane today.

As the world moves closer to autonomous and self-driving vehicles, road safety experts are turning from technology to psychology to better understand the road to safer mobility, according Professor Narelle Haworth, director of QUT's Centre for Accident Research & Road Safety - Queensland (CARRS-Q).

Professor Haworth launched the 2016 International Conference on Traffic and Transport Psychology today (August 2, 2016) in Brisbane. The event runs from August 2-5 and will see more than 300 psychologists, researchers and safety experts share the latest in road safety research with the aim of reducing road trauma.

CARRS-Q and Griffith University are hosting the event which also marks the half-way point of the UN Decade of Action, a global initiative that unites more than 70 countries in a campaign to reduce traffic crashes and road fatalities.

"A lot has changed in the last five years. Today we are presented with utopian visions of automated transport in which humans have little role to play in driving but the road to the future must consider human motivations, decisions and capabilities," Professor Haworth said.

"As road safety experts we need to be asking what technologies do drivers really want and will they use these technologies in the way that developers expect?

"Technology isn't the obstacle, psychology is, and the challenge is to understand if humans can trust autonomous machines."

Professor Haworth said that many people would be unwilling to give up the private automobile and move to shared, self-driving cars.

She said considerations also need to be given to whether autonomous vehicles could contribute to other health issues such as obesity, by reducing the need to walk to parking spots or public transport.

"Will we be willing to entrust our children to self-driving machines? And will improvements in technology improve road safety in developing countries or just magnify the current inequities?

"All of these questions relate to traffic and transport psychology and they are too important to be left to technology developers to solve.

"If these questions are not answered well, then the road to safer mobility may be a long one with many detours."

Professor Haworth said while considerable progress in road safety had been made as part of the UN Decade of Action, road crashes were still estimated to kill 1.25 million people per year and injure many more.

"We need to continue the momentum to ensure that real action is taken to make roads safer for the challenges faced today and into the future."

More information: icttp2016.com/

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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