

## **Conference: The Future of Connected and Autonomous Vehicles in Malta**

The Conference on autonomous vehicles was held on the 19<sup>th</sup> May 2022 at the Westin Dragonara Resort in St. Julian's. The main scope of this conference was to inform and bring together experts and stakeholders to discuss current challenges, such as Malta's approach in the autonomous vehicles segment, a safety standard approach toward autonomous vehicles, transformation in action as well as opportunities. During the half-day conference, a panel discussion was held, allowing the attendees to participate in areas which will pave the way to the future of autonomous vehicles on our roads.

The Conference kick started at about 8.00hrs with a welcome coffee, delegates started to arrive and registered themselves gradually. During the welcome coffee there was opportunity for the delegates to network. At about 9.30hrs it was time for the conference to officially start with a speech by the Chairman of Transport Malta Mr. Joseph Bugeja. Chief Officer Pierre Montebello followed by presenting a few advantages and disadvantages of autonomous vehicles in everyday life and how this concept is not so far away as one might think. Of course, major infrastructural changes are required before all this can be made possible. Then it was time for the event to continue from yet another perspective, the safety standard approach where Mr. Francois Guichard, a mechanical engineer at UNECE, addressed the audience and gave insight on how these autonomous vehicles can help facilitate as well as make life simpler and most importantly safer for us all. The fact that around 94% to 96% of road accidents are caused by human error was mentioned, also highlighting that such accidents are more easily preventable should autonomous vehicles become more common. Ms. Clara Scerri Delia, senior technical specialist at the Malta Communication Authority delivered her speech and views on the topic and how this new technology can help lessen the problems that revolve around this issue. 5G technology is also mentioned as one of the key points for these autonomous vehicles to operate. Time for a coffee break where the participants can relax a bit and, in the meantime, process the information that has just been passed on to them. Delegates are encouraged to visit a demo that has been set up in an adjacent room which is being taken care of by Mr. Dangla and Mr. Fabries from EasyMile.

Following the break, the conference continues with a presentation by Mr. Chehwan, director of Strategic-Alliance and Institutional Relationship at Navya Group. He takes us through the different levels of testing currently being made at Navya and around the world. It is now time for the panel discussion: *The race for the car of the future*. The compere introduces panel members to the delegates, and they are invited to take the stage. We have Mr. Remy Dangla, Sales Manager at EasyMile, Dr. Odette Lewis, Senior Lecturer at the University of Malta, Ing. Ronald Attard Pullicino, Senior Manager

Land Transport Directorate at the Authority for Transport in Malta, Mr. Anthony David Gatt, Chief Marketing, Media, and PR Officer at the Malta Enterprise and last but of course, not least Mr. Francis Valletta, Board Member at the Malta Insurance Association.

The panel discussion starts off with some relevant and direct questions to the panellists by the compere. Questions are then received from the floor where once again very good and relevant points are raised such as who is to be blamed in case of an accident; the vehicle owner, the manufacturing company or even the victim itself? Another question raised was whether autonomous vehicles need any specific infrastructure such as road adjustments to function properly and how much are we ourselves ready to trust these types of vehicles?

Mr. Ivan Pierre Vella, Director Public Transport at the Authority for Transport in Malta, delivers the concluding speech followed by a final resume of the conference addressed to the delegates who are once again encouraged to visit the demo. The conference ended with a networking lunch.