

New lab to research smart car technology

By: Grace Chua, Straits Times (Home B6), 30 April 2014

A NEW joint research laboratory here could bring self-driving cars one step closer to reality.

Yesterday, Continental Automotive Singapore signed a Memorandum of Understanding with two research institutes here to set up an Intelligent Transport Systems laboratory to study new automotive technologies that use communications and information networks.

The automotive supplier's collaborators are the Agency for Science, Technology and Research's (A*Star) Institute for Infocomm Research (I2R) and the Technical University of Munich's CREATE centre here, TUM CREATE.

The lab could look at, for instance, cars that are automated enough to get close to each other safely, "talk" to each other and be squeezed together more tightly in traffic, reducing the land needed for road space here, suggested TUM professor of computer science Alois Knoll.

And if cars, trains and scooters are synchronised, a commuter might never miss a train again if he could step out of one and into another mode of transport seamlessly, he added.

The lab, a three-year collaboration, will be based at I2R at Fusionopolis, and start with two engineers from each organisation, said I2R's executive director, Dr Lee Shiang Long. The projects it is working on have yet to be finalised, he added, but they will be technologies that can be commercialised in the short term.

Continental managing director Lo Kien Foh said the lab would be a potential "living laboratory" for the conceptualisation and testing of future intelligent transport solutions for Asia, tapping the local research institutes' strengths in automotive, communications and information research.

By 2016, the Germany-headquartered firm wants to have developed a partially automated car, and by 2025, a fully automated one, he said.

Already, government agencies here are using communications and sensing technology to make transport and other aspects of urban life "smarter".

The Land Transport Authority is studying next-generation electronic road pricing that makes use of global navigation satellites to charge motorists by the distance they travel, for instance. And the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore has a Smart Cities Programme Office to harness infocommunications technology to improve transport, energy use, buildings and health care.

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