

First test of self-driving cars on Flanders' roads



by Alan Hope,

Summary

A 'platoon test' of self-driving cars took place yesterday in Flanders for the first time, with safety systems being tested

Hands on the wheel

The first mass test of self-driving cars on roads and motorways in Flanders took place yesterday. The test was organised by insurance broker Aon, as part of a campaign to raise awareness about self-driving cars.



The so-called platoon test involved cars provided by eight manufacturers on a route from Diegem to Bornem via the Brussels Ring. The cars do not yet actually drive on their own; a driver is still required to have their hands on the wheel.

The cars do, however, offer a powerful set of driving assistance options, such as scanning the surroundings, detecting obstacles, staying within the lanes and adjusting the speed according to conditions.

One of the cars was occupied by Flemish mobility minister Ben Weyts (*pictured*). “If we actually want to do something about the 400 road deaths every year in Flanders, this could be the solution,” he said. “Nine out of 10 accidents are caused by human error, and computers are better drivers than humans. They don’t drink, they follow the rules, and they’re not distracted.”

The test was expected to provide crucial information about safety systems. Aon organised a similar platoon test in the Netherlands earlier this year.

Mobility sciences professor Tom Brijs of Hasselt University is evaluating the project and questioned whether it’s suitable for Flanders. “This system is mainly suitable for quieter motorways,” he said. “With all the on and off ramps in Flanders and its busy roads network, you would really have to switch the system on and off more often. People really need to learn to work with the system, in driving schools for example.”

Photo courtesy Ben Weyts/Twitter