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Future Mobility Newsletter

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Transportation Evolution Institute

Institut de l'évolution du transport

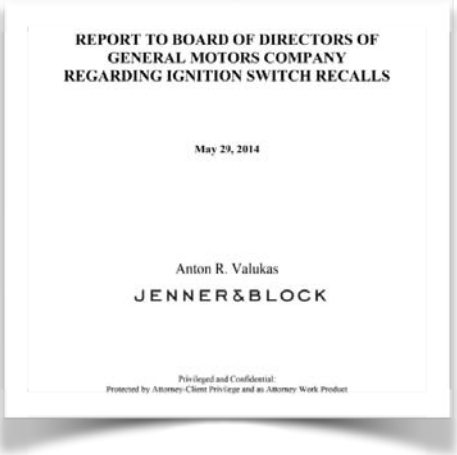
57 cents

Fifty-seven cents is the difference in price between a quality ignition switch and one that caused at least 54 crashes and resulted in at least 13 lives lost and an unknown number of injuries.

In the last few months, we have witnessed hearings before a congressional subcommittee, internal investigations and millions of vehicles recalled over the faulty switch "which can cause the engine to cut off in traffic, disabling power steering, power brakes and air bags and making difficult to control the vehicle". (*GM recall linked to 57-cent ignition component*. Associated Press, last updated April 2nd, 2014)

The investigation

"In the fall of 2002, General Motors ("GM") personnel made a decision that would lead to catastrophic results" begins Anton Valukas' report to the Board of Directors of GM Regarding Ignition Switch Recalls.


REPORT TO BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF
GENERAL MOTORS COMPANY
REGARDING IGNITION SWITCH RECALLS

May 29, 2014

Anton R. Valukas

JENNER&BLOCK

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Internal documents indicate that "GM received hundreds of complaints about the ignition switch and may have diagnosed the problem as much as 10 years ago" but decided not to act, not to inform motorists, not to implement a program to remove these vehicles from service. (*GM recall linked to 57-cent ignition component*.) Mary Barra, GM's CEO, claims that she was only made aware of the situation in January of this year.

Lack of a "suitable business case"

An internal GM memo dating back to 2005, discussed problems with the Cobalt ignition switches but opted against a recall. The memo read: "tooling costs and piece price was too high and none of the solutions present a suitable business case."

How can customer safety and saving lives NOT be a compelling enough business case?

An acceptable level of loss of life

While GM claims that this faulty switch caused 54 crashes, resulting in loss of 13 lives, trial lawyers suing GM indicate that the death toll exceeds 60. Lives lost, families dismembered, …all for 57 cents.

Laura Christian, the mother of one of the victims stated that "car manufacturers cannot be permitted to act as if there was an acceptable level of loss of life".

Accountability

As we move toward fully driverless vehicles, as a society, we will need to decide how we will program these vehicles to act when faced with an avoidable collision. If following a collision, it is determined that the vehicle respected the algorithms (as decided by society), then can we blame the manufacturer or the technology supplier? If, however, the collision occurred because of system failure or because the algorithms (assuming they are in conformity with local laws) were not respected, then manufacturers/ technology suppliers will need to take full responsibility.

"It's clear GM's concern was with its bottom line and not the safety of our loved ones"
Terry DiBattista, mother of a victim

Driverless safety

Auto manufacturers around the world are incorporating autonomous vehicle features into their vehicles in order to reduce the number and severity of collisions. Moving to fully driverless vehicles will help eliminate many of the auto-related collisions that result in tens of thousands of lives lost per year in NA and more than 1.2 million worldwide annually.

Consumers "trust Google to make their self-driving cars more than giant automakers".
http://www.bizjournals.com/sanjose/news/2013/10/09/in-self-driving-car-race-consumers.html?page=all

Tests undertaken to date with level 3 or semi-autonomous vehicles have led to questions regarding a de-skilled motorist's ability to handle a difficult or dangerous situation when the vehicle transfers control. Should we be insisting on level 3 autonomy or would moving to fully driverless vehicles provide the greater safety benefits being sought?

Auto manufacturers in a shared, driverless world

This newsletter has always argued that the future of driverless is predominantly electric (particularly in regions where clean, renewable electricity is available) and shared. Driverless vehicles provide the benefit of access to a vehicle whenever required without the hassles of ongoing maintenance – particularly in a context where motorists generally use their vehicle less than 10% of the time.

In such a shared driverless world, would you care if the vehicle that takes you from point A to point B is blue or red? Would you care if the vehicle is a GM or a Ford? When you hail a taxi today, do you care about the make of the vehicle?

Do you think that most auto-manufacturing executives are prepared for such a shared, driverless world?

Could this be contributing to certain original equipment manufacturer's insistence to remain with semi-autonomous features for as long as possible instead of moving right now to fully driverless vehicles?

Is this interest to move slowly based on motorist safety or a desire to protect share value?

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In accordance with the new Canadian anti-spam laws, we have sent emails to individuals on our distribution list requesting consent for continued distribution. If you wish to continue receiving this letter and have not provided consent, please do so.

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SUMMER BREAK | VACANCES D'ÉTÉ

For those of you participating in the Transportation Research Board meetings in a few weeks (July 14-18) in San Francisco, we look forward to seeing you there.

We wish you all a great summer. We'll be back at the end of the summer with great news to share.

Si vous comptez participer aux réunions du Transportation Research Board (14 - 18 juillet), il nous fera grand plaisir de vous rencontrer à San Francisco.

Nous vous souhaitons un bel été. Nous vous reviendrons à la fin de l'été avec plus de nouvelles.

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Catherine Kargas: **ckargas@marcon.qc.ca** Pierre Ducharme: **pducharme@marcon.qc.ca**

In the news | Les nouvelles

The ethical dilemma

The decision regarding what the driverless vehicle will do when faced with a situation where at least one human being will be injured or killed is increasingly being discussed in the media. Who will decide on the ethical algorithms? This is a challenging question that as a society, sooner or later, we will need to answer. (http://www.forbes.com/sites/timworstall/2014/06/18/when-should-your-driverless-car-from-google-be-allowed-to-kill-you/)

German carmakers consider black box recorders for self-drive cars

German auto OEMs are considering the use of aircraft-style "black box" data recorders in self-driving cars. This is a contentious idea in a country worried about surveillance, but a potentially crucial step in getting the new technology on the road. Installing an aircraft-style data recorder could help address some of the questions associated with what went wrong in case of an accident. It would provide manufacturers and insurers clarity over who is liable when a collision occurs. (http://kfgo.com/news/articles/2014/jun/20/german-carmakers-consider-black-box-recorders-for-self-drive-cars/)

British secretary opens UK centre for smart transportation technology

British Secretary Vince Cable has opened a new innovation centre for smart transportation technology that will transform the movement of people and goods around the world, generating up to £90 billion per year for the UK by 2025. (http://www.fleetnews.co.uk/news/2014/6/13/business-secretary-opens-uk-centre-for-smart-transport-technology/52687/)

Reducing traffic by as much as 80%

A recent study concludes that driverless cars, in combination with sharing schemes, could take up to 4/5 of the traffic off the roads of congested cities. Imagine that! Much-needed relief for taxpayers and government transportation infrastructure budgets. (http://www.govtech.com/transportation/Driverless-Cars-Could-Reduce-Traffic-by-80-percent.html)

Dutch plans for self-driving trucks within five years

In the area of passenger vehicles, moving to fully driverless cars will involve not only a dollar and cents analysis but will also be influenced by consumer taste and willingness to move to a new form of mobility. In the area of commercial trucking, however, the decision will be purely economics. For this reason, if the right technology exists, the penetration level of self-driving trucks may happen faster than that for passenger vehicles. It's all about ROI.

The Netherlands wants to compete the first demonstrations at the beginning of 2015 and roll out the trial for self-driving trucks in a controlled environment as soon as possible. The road trial, involving full-sized lorries driving in what is called a "platoon" could happen in the Rotterdam Port, or on a motorway with advanced infrastructure in southern part of the country. The goal: to develop a reliable system within five years! (http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/06/16/netherlands-tech-autos-idUSL5N0OX3S420140616)

Global car sharing membership tops 3.5 million

Strong growth is expected to continue until the end of the decade and beyond. Driverless vehicles will make this form of mobility enormously attractive. (http://www.just-auto.com/news/global-car-sharing-membership-tops-35m-fs_id147195.aspx)

California ridesharing bill 2293

CA's bill 2293, backed by several insurance companies, ensures sufficient insurance coverage while the ridesharing app is turned on. Among other things, the bill would require Transportation Network Companies' liability insurance to defend and indemnify their drivers when they have a claim or accident. Will this become the norm for ridesharing bills in other states? What about in Canada? (http://www.insurancejournal.com/news/west/2014/06/17/332274.htm)

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http://www.scoop.it/t/evolution-of-transportation