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## **‘Commercial vehicles are taking to telematics faster’**

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The country's automotive sector is gearing up to implement telematics to better track vehicle movements, fleet management and to offer value-added services, including infotainment.

While several carmakers are at an advanced stage of evaluating, some even adopting them in new cars, mostly high-end ones, the commercial vehicle segment seems to be much ahead of the block.

Three to four CV manufacturers are on course to offer such systems 12-18 months from now. Tata Motors and Ashok Leyland Limited, among others, who supply vehicles in bulk, will probably implement telematics sooner.

There is also potential for such systems in railways, Anil Sondur, Vice-President, Tata Elxsi Ltd, said. He explained how and why telematics will become important. The commercial introduction of this technology could first be in CVs, by 2014-15, and in cars by 2015 or 2016.

### **Excerpts:**

#### **Could you explain the concept of telematics and its utility in vehicles?**

Telematics help monitor a vehicle. Combining the global positioning system (GPS) with on-board diagnostics it is possible to record and map exactly where a car is, how fast it is travelling and how it is behaving internally. It is machine-to-machine communication, whereby a device plugged into the

on-board diagnostics port of a vehicle, or originally installed by the manufacturer, sends, receives and stores information.

This is via wireless communication, in conjunction with affecting control on remote objects. GPS navigation, integrated hands-free cell phones, wireless safety communications and automatic driving assistance systems all are covered under the telematics umbrella.

Formula One teams have been using telematics for years to know exactly where the opponents are on the racetrack. Sensors and a trackside wireless network are used to track information. It is useful in fleet tracking and management, and in emergency call management.

New gadgets, mobile phones and touch-screen devices inside car are making a difference and enhancing driving pleasure... Yet these have not yet become mainstream in India?

The Indian automotive market has not realised its potential, resulting in a relatively smaller number of car sales. The bottleneck is also infrastructure. Therefore, volumes are still not good enough to introduce new features in infotainment and vehicle comfort, especially in the lower segment of the car market.

Once volumes grow, many of these features will be available in A and B segment cars. Since the volumes are still relatively low, introduction of touch screen or similar features in sub-Rs 10 lakh cars is not cost-effective.

### **Can telematics help cut vehicle insurance costs? Are some companies looking at this option? Will it need an IRDA nod?**

Telematics does play a crucial role in lowering the vehicle insurance premium. For instance, telematics in vehicles can track vehicular thefts. Current technologies available are aimed at preventing theft of vehicles but very few have solutions that can report theft automatically.

If someone is trying to steal a car, it can send out a message to the car-owner's phone. With technology progressing quickly, it will soon be possible that the car sends an image too, along with the message. This feature would make use of the multiple cameras modern cars use these days.

Telematics will not only give information on thefts but can also give other details, such as driver's performance, speeds at which you drive, time of day you make your journeys, and so on — and then feed such data back to your insurance company. This means fewer crashes and incidents and, thereby, lower insurance premium.

These help control claim costs, enhance pricing sophistication, improve profitability, and differentiate their policyholders' products and services.

### **Will this not be particularly beneficial to commercial fleet operators?**

Commercial fleet operators are increasingly harnessing the power of telematics, not only for basic and enhanced vehicle tracking but also for routing, fuel expense reduction, accident response, stolen vehicle recovery, and improved safety through driver education and behaviour modification.

Telematics technologies will also make legal process more hassle-free as there would be more chances of the said events being recorded in the form of images or electronics transmissions.

Having worked with leading original equipment manufacturers (OEM's) towards designing next-gen infotainment systems, Tata Elxsi will play a critical role in building eco-systems for the changing the automotive landscape.

**When do you see telematics becoming more mainstream?**

Globally, transport of goods by road is the most popular mode. It is also among the most economical. The automotive market is very large and any technology solution that helps improve productivity is quickly adapted.

If you take a transport fleet operator or State road transport corporation managing thousands of buses, telematics will play a big role in its efficient management and also, possibly, lower insurance costs as vehicle data is more easily available.