Connected vehicles have the potential to transform the way Americans travel through the creation of a safe, interoperable wireless communications network—a system that includes cars, buses, trucks, trains, traffic signals, smart phones, and other devices. In the past, the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) has focused on helping people survive crashes. Connected vehicle technology changes that paradigm by giving people the tools to avoid crashes.

Why Connected Vehicle Technologies Are Needed

Connected vehicle technologies aim to tackle some of the biggest challenges in the surface transportation industry—in the areas of safety, mobility, and environment.

- **Safety:** According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), there were 7.2 million crashes in 2016. The number of fatalities from vehicle crashes is falling but still accounted for 37,133 in 2017. Connected vehicle technologies can give drivers the tools they need to anticipate potential crashes and significantly reduce the number of lives lost each year.

- **Mobility:** According to the Texas Transportation Institute, U.S. highway users wasted 6.9 billion hours stuck in traffic in 2014. Connected vehicle mobility applications can enable system users and system operators to make smart choices that reduce travel delay.

- **Environment:** According to the Texas Transportation Institute, the total amount of wasted fuel topped 3.1 billion gallons in 2014. Connected vehicle environmental applications can give motorists the real time information they need to make “green” transportation choices.

Connected vehicles feature safety warnings that alert drivers of potentially dangerous conditions—impending collisions, icy roads, and dangerous curves—before the driver is aware of them. The technology is expected to reduce unimpaired vehicle crashes by 80 percent.
How Connected Vehicles Work

Different communications technologies (satellite, cellular, dedicated short-range communications) may be utilized depending on the performance requirements of the connected vehicle applications. Cars, trucks, buses, and other vehicles can “talk” to each other with in-vehicle or aftermarket devices that continuously share important safety and mobility information. Connected vehicles can also use wireless communication to “talk” to traffic signals, work zones, toll booths, school zones, and other types of infrastructure. The vehicle information communicated does not identify the driver or vehicle, and technical controls have been put in place to help prevent vehicle tracking and tampering with the system.

How Connected Vehicles Improve Safety

Connected vehicle safety applications enable drivers to have 360-degree awareness of hazards and situations they cannot even see. Through in-car warnings, drivers are alerted to imminent crash situations, such as merging trucks, cars in the driver’s blind side, or when a vehicle ahead brakes suddenly. By communicating with roadside infrastructure, drivers can be alerted when they enter a school zone, if workers are on the roadside, and if an upcoming traffic light is about to change.

The connected vehicle system creates a dynamic transportation network based on an open platform to allow for new and creative applications. Open standards allow anyone to develop new products and applications that will work in this space.

How Connected Vehicles Keep People Moving

Private signals in vehicles help generate new data about how, when, and where vehicles travel—information that transportation managers can analyze to help make roads safer and less congested.

The same signals could also be shared among mobile devices and roadside sensors. This exciting new data-rich environment will also be the genesis for a multitude of new mobility applications that will help to keep traffic flowing and make it easier for people to plan their travel experience. Imagine, for instance, apps that can help you find open parking spaces, locate available last-minute ride-share partners, guarantee you make your bus or train connection, or help a blind pedestrian cross the street. With an open source system for mobility applications, there will be minimal restrictions and limitless opportunities.

How Connected Vehicles Improve The Environment

Mitigating greenhouse gas (GHG) contributions is everyone’s responsibility. In 2016, the transportation sector contributed 28.5 percent of the country’s GHG emissions, according to the Environmental Protection Agency’s Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks. Connected vehicle technologies generate real-time data that drivers and transportation managers can use to make green transportation choices.

For example, real-time information about traffic conditions help motorists eliminate unnecessary stops and vehicles reach optimal fuel-efficiency. Informed travelers may also be able to avoid congestion by taking alternate routes or public transit, or rescheduling their trip—any of which can make their trip more eco-friendly. With real-time information, travelers have a realistic idea of when transit vehicles will arrive. That information also can help improve bus and train connections, and this will help make public transportation more appealing to the average traveler.

With connected vehicle technology, drivers get warning messages in their vehicles when a potential crash is imminent.

Photo Source: USDOT