Common tongue for talking car

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Smart transport . . . a national ITS could be built in the next 10 years.

Australia is likely to adopt an international standard that would wirelessly link motor vehicles with transport infrastructure, such as traffic lights and level crossings, helping to minimise road accidents and traffic jams.

The federal government is backing a proposal to adopt the wireless frequency used in Europe and the US that would standardise a national intelligent transport system (ITS).

The government's endorsement was announced in a discussion paper from the Australian Communications and Media Authority yesterday.

The proposal would align Australia with a global ITS standard, which would most likely save the local transport industry billions of dollars in technology conversion costs were a different frequency to be adopted.

Australian vehicle exporters would also have had to modify their embedded ITS systems to comply with the international standard.

ACMA said yesterday that it wanted to reserve the international 5.9ghz frequency for intelligent transport as part of a forthcoming radio spectrum carve-up.

This would allow imported vehicles with embedded ITS connectivity to communicate with a national ITS irrespective of the country of origin.

The proposed allocation has been welcomed by ITS Australia, a lobby group comprised of state transport authorities and infrastructure providers and operators.

The group has been pressing government to establish a national system of transport communication.

"We see it as a real positive," ITS president Norm Pidgeon said. "We've been looking for a spectrum allocation in the [proposed frequency] range."

The ACMA paper will help inform a national conference in Melbourne next month at which government transport ministers and industry will discuss a process to build a national ITS system over the next 10 years.

Victoria is investing in smart infrastructure, including light poles and signs that send data on a vehicle's location, speed and journey to traffic controllers.

The proposed ITS frequency could interfere with with electronic tollway tags, which use the 5.8ghz frequency.

The general manager of road-user charging technology company Q-Free Australia, Craig Lennard, said that enabling the new frequency in the existing tolling system could take "some time to emerge" because the technology was well established.

Mr Pidgeon said that embedding ITS systems in vehicles would make tollway tags redundant.