

Traffic safety related issues of the common transport policy of the European Union

1. Introduction

The transport sector is critical to future economic, social and environmental progress. It is the duty of all mobility actors to promote more sustainable practices. The governments and businesses in all sectors need to commit to policies and programmes that will improve the current mobility trends.

The concept of sustainable mobility includes the balance of economy, environment and society. The harmonization of these functions of the transport contributes to the more efficient use of non renewable resources, equitable allocation of urban space to the most efficient transport modes,

Since freedom of movement for both persons and goods is one of the major issues for the European Union, the need for an efficient and safe transport system - in particular for road transport - is a prerequisite for a fair European integration. All users of the road transport system should also benefit from harmonised conditions, be they private users, customers or commercial hauliers.

In September 2001 the Commission adopted a White Paper on the Transport Policy which describes what has been achieved so far both at the Union and at the Member States levels and what should be done in the near future.

2. Main trends - road safety is in the focus

The development of road transport in EUR-15 can be summarised in a few figures :

- the global distance travelled by all road vehicles has tripled over three decades ;
- there are 469 private cars per thousand persons in 2000 compared to 232 in 1975 ;
- the volume of road freight haulage has been growing by 34% between 1991 and 2000;
- the road freight haulage takes about 75% of freight traffic within the European Union in 2000 compared to 50% in 1970
- the road safety issue is still a major concern with some 40.000 fatalities a year (half of the figure of 1970) and more than 1.7 million injured. For these reasons the Commission has recently adopted a **road safety action programme** with a view to again reducing the number of fatalities by 50% by the year 2010.

The Commission's Transport policy White Paper stresses that, given the growing volume of traffic, safety aspects are particularly important. While transport is regarded as part and parcel of economic growth and prosperity, it is increasingly being perceived as a potential hazard. Dramatic accidents are increasingly affecting the general public. However, the degree of acceptance of unsafe transport is not always consistent. Every year, the equivalent of the population of an average-sized town perishes. Road casualties, whether dead or injured, represent a cost to society amounting to tens of billions of euros and an incalculable human cost. The aim of the European road safety action programme is to half **the number of road accident victims in the European Union by 2010. The ambitious objective means a shared responsibility.**

3. Road safety action programme

This programme sets out, with the requisite level of detail, specific measures in accordance with what the Commission has already endorsed, and reaffirms the overall of halving the

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number of road accident victims by 2010. To ensure a sharing of responsibilities, and in accordance with the competences of each party involved (EU, Member States, regional and local authorities, industry, transport companies and private users), this programme aims to encourage road users to improve their behaviour, to make vehicle safer, and to improve road infrastructure. It provides for the setting up of a European Road Safety Observatory within the Commission. Lastly, it proposes that all the parties concerned, whether public or private, should subscribe to a European Road Safety Charter.

4. The importance of the programme

The significance of the programme can be characterized by the facts listed below.

- Road safety directly affects all of the territory of the European Union and all its inhabitants: in the 15-member European Union, 375 million road users, 200 million of them driving licence holders, use 200 million vehicles on 4 million km of roads. Ever greater mobility comes at a high price: 1 300 000 accidents a year cause 40 000 deaths and 1 700 000 injuries on the roads. The direct and indirect cost of this carnage has been estimated at .160 billion, i.e. 2% of EU GNP.
- Although there has been a slow but regular improvement in safety overall (during the last 30 years, the overall volume of road traffic in the countries which today make up the EU has tripled, while the number of road deaths has fallen by half), the situation is still socially unacceptable and difficult to justify to the citizen.

In its White Paper on European transport policy, the Commission has therefore proposed that

- the European Union should set itself the target of **halving the number of road deaths by 2010**. Although the Community has contributed to road safety over very many years, in particular through more than 50 technical standardisation directives, and despite the fact that the Maastricht Treaty clarified the legal means available to the Community to establish a framework and to act,
- the Member States have to take action at Community level for the harmonisation of blood alcohol limits which has been under discussion for twelve years,
- the Commission will propose standardising the rules on **checks** concerning the road traffic offences which cause the most deaths and concerning compliance with social regulations.
- in the context of a proposal on road infrastructure, the Commission propose action to deal with **particularly hazardous places**.
- another proposal will concern the recasting of the Directive on driving licences.
- a number of direct and accompanying measures which the Commission plans to implement to enhance the benefit of the activities undertaken by the European Union, in particular the development of **new safety technologies** under the Research Framework Programmes to add value to the efforts made by the Member States.

This action programmes aims to:

- encourage **road users** to improve their behaviour, in particular through better compliance with the existing legislation, basic and continuous training for private and professional drivers and by pursuing efforts to combat dangerous practices,
- make **vehicles** safer, in particular through technical harmonisation and support for technical progress;
- apply concerning electronic technologies ("eSafety") which will be covered by a forthcoming Commission communication on information and communication technologies for intelligent vehicles".

- improve **road infrastructure**, in particular by defining best practices and disseminating them at the local level and by eliminating accident black spots.
- develop specific measures for establishing a methodological framework to identify and disseminate best practices, through the **drafting of technical guides**, improving the **collection and analysis of data on accidents and physical injuries**, and pursuing research and development to find solutions for the future.

5. The role of vehicle design in the road safety action programme

Significant improvements in the protection available to vehicle occupants in every Member State continue to be achieved thanks to technological progress. The EU now has exclusive competence for whole vehicle type-approval for cars and two-wheel motor vehicles. Moreover, there is a revolution taking place in automotive technology which can provide considerable benefits with regard to active safety and accident prevention. Vehicles are increasingly being fitted with ultramodern electronic devices which can control their safety functions. Without awaiting future technologies, it will suffice to implement now, through Making use of technical progress harmonised action, the technologies already available with regard to vehicle safety and protective equipment to deliver a substantial proportion of the target reduction, in particular for commercial vehicles.

5.1 The European new car assessment programme (EuroNCAP)

Going beyond the EU's vehicle type-approval scheme, EuroNCAP tests the safety of new cars in accordance with harmonised testing protocols under conditions representative of different types of crash which cause serious injuries to occupants and possibly to pedestrians. The Commission will continue to provide support for EuroNCAP with a view to enabling further progress to be made, to raise awareness among and inform consumers and to strengthen the representation of the Member States.

5.2 The impact of the new technologies

The impact of the new technologies on safety may be both positive and negative. The widespread emergence of mobile phones, the use of which by drivers increases the risk of a fatal accident five-fold, constitutes a new risk to which a suitable response needs to be found. That is why it is necessary to come up with an appropriate framework to encourage the use of effective technologies while avoiding new risks.

Sweden has the highest rate of seat belt use in Europe: 95%. However, half the people killed in accidents there were not wearing their seat belts. This shows the high potential of any measure which will further increase seat belt use, in particular seat belt reminder systems for all occupants, in both the front and back seats.

Although much has already been done to increase seat belt use, there is still a potential of 4000 lives that could be saved each year. By adapting passive safety measures.

Passive safety measures:

- Develop a harmonised specification for the installation of audible or visual seat belt reminder systems and promote their widespread use by voluntary agreement.
- Promote the widespread use of universal anchorage systems for child restraint devices.
- Improve cars to reduce the severity of accidents involving pedestrians and cyclists.
- Study the causes and ways of preventing whiplash injuries.
- Support the development of intelligent restraint systems.
- Adapt to technical progress the front, side and rear-end impact directives for lorries to limit vehicle underrun, and introduce energy absorption criteria.
- Enhance vehicle compatibility.

A lot of active safety measures can improve the situation. The new on-board information and communication technologies (*intelligent transport systems*, or ITS) offer considerable potential for reducing the number of road accident victims. The EU, the Member States and the industry need to establish an integrated approach to improve the effectiveness of these new safety technologies. The EU will adopt a plan concerning intelligent traffic management systems drawn up by the government authorities in the interest of road safety, so as to derive maximum benefits for society as a whole.

Active safety measures:

- Examine the widescale use of daytime running lights on all vehicles.
- Improve the visibility of heavy duty vehicles.
- Eliminate blindspots towards the rear for drivers of heavy duty vehicles.
- Assess measures to reduce tyre-related accidents.
- Examine driver impairment detection devices, e.g. alcolocks and driver fatigue detectors.
- Examine national trials of intelligent speed adaptation devices and assess their acceptability to the public.
- Improve motor cycle safety through legislation or voluntary agreements.
- Examine the benefits of harmonising the approval of adaptations to vehicles for persons with reduced mobility.
- Adopt a plan concerning information and communication systems and establish the necessary regulatory framework for implementing such systems.

Identify priority areas for the development and implementation of performance standards to optimise the man-machine interface and the road safety potential of telematics applications.

6. Conclusions

The Commission hopes that everyone concerned will sign up to and cooperate in the programme in question. To this end, it proposes that everyone in authority, with decision-making powers, or acting in an economic, social or representative function should give a solemn undertaking and subscribe to a **European Road Safety Charter**. Apart from complying with universal principles, each signatory would undertake to implement specific actions. The commitments given will be publicised and compliance with them monitored.

References:

Road transport safety action programme. Information and Communication Unit of DG Energy and Transport.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/energy_transport/mm_dg/index_en.html