



European
Commission

Newsletter N° 11 | March 2013

Road Safety Newsletter



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Overcoming obstacles to road injury reduction

The last 10 years have seen Europe's roads become considerably safer, with a drop in fatalities of over 44 %. In terms of the risk of injury, safety has also improved, with numbers of injuries having been cut by some 25 %.

That reductions in numbers of injuries have not kept pace with those in numbers of fatalities is significant. It is one reason why the EU has decided to make injury reduction an important part of its road safety priorities for 2011–20.

The seriousness of the issue is emphasised by the fact that for every death on EU roads, there are an estimated four permanently disabling injuries. Injury levels therefore remain unacceptably high with 1.5 million people recorded as having been injured on the EU's roads in 2011. This underlines the socio-economic cost of road injuries, which is thought to be around 2 % of EU GDP annually.

A barrier to launching specific measures to reduce injuries, and particularly serious injuries, has been the lack of comprehensive and comparable data on the issue. This has hampered attempts to

analyse the question with a view to identifying solutions and establishing reduction targets.

Of the 1.5 million injuries recorded in 2011, around 250 000 were reported as serious. However, the lack of a common and objective definition of what constitutes a serious injury makes it difficult to read anything into this figure and leaves open the possibility of extensive misreporting and under-reporting.

Against this background, the EU has now, together with Member State experts, arrived at a proposal for a common definition of serious injury. This should prove invaluable to future EU efforts to cut road injuries.



A common definition for serious road traffic injuries

The importance of a common EU-wide definition for serious road injuries cannot be understated. As Susanne Lindahl of the European Commission Road Safety team tells us, 'Arriving at a common EU definition of serious injury is a major step forward as it is a prerequisite for starting work on a comprehensive action strategy to tackle serious injuries'.

The definition proposal has come on the back of extensive discussion within the EU High Level Group on Road Safety in June 2012 and January 2013. A public consultation on development of a strategy to reduce road traffic injuries, which took place between April and July 2012, has also contributed to the elaboration of the proposal.

The proposal is based on medical criteria — specifically the Maximum Abbreviated Injury Scale (MAIS). This is an anatomical-based coding system used to classify and describe the severity of individual injuries, particularly traumatic injuries. The MAIS tool is widely used by medical professionals and in hospital records, and using the new definition, Member States will quickly be able to report data to the European Road Accident Database. The Member States have committed themselves to using this definition when reporting data to the Road Accident Database and it will be used in EU road safety reports and all other EU road safety statistics.

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With a view to ensuring the availability of accurate injury data, the Commission has been working to develop data collection and reporting systems in the Member States based on the common definition proposal. In line with advice from the High Level Group on Road Safety, three data collection options have been proposed. These are: using a combination of police and hospital records; using only hospital records; or using only police records but applying a national coefficient to correct any under-reporting.

A flexible approach

Flexibility is of the essence, as Maria Teresa Sanz Villegas of the Commission Road Safety team tells us, 'Different Member States face different challenges in developing new data gathering and reporting systems. That is why we propose a flexible approach with three options. All Member States should be able to apply at least the most basic of these options in time to start gathering data in 2014'.

Once each Member State decides on its model, it will be possible to deliver accurate figures on serious road injuries. It is expected that the first data based on the common definition should be those for 2014. In the first instance, the aim is to arrive at an accurate total of people seriously injured in road accidents.

On the basis of the number of serious injuries in 2014, it will be possible to set reduction targets for the period 2015–20. This will complement the EU's existing aim of halving the number of road fatalities by 2020 and should give the issue of serious injuries the same political prominence as that of road deaths.

According to Susanne Lindahl, 'A target and results-based approach has been successful in reducing road fatalities. We believe this can be repeated for serious injuries and so we also aim to propose a strategic percentage target for reduction of serious injuries as soon as the new data is available'.

The Commission is in the process of preparing a Staff Working Document to report on progress made in elaborating the common definition, developing data collection and reporting options and adopting injury reduction targets. The final text of this document should be adopted in the first half of 2013. In the longer term, it should lead to the adoption of a comprehensive action strategy on serious road injuries.



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Irish EU Presidency makes road safety a priority

The first half of 2013 sees Ireland assume the EU Presidency. Transport is a key action area for the Irish Presidency and, as Irish Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Mr Leo Varadkar recently told the European Parliament Transport Committee, 'the over-riding (transport) priority for our Presidency will be to promote a safer, more integrated, more efficient and sustainable transport network for Europe'.



A safer transport network means safer roads, and given its excellent road safety record, Ireland's assumption of the Presidency is very welcome. Ireland has one of the lowest road fatality rates per capita (36 per million) in the EU and deaths on Irish roads continue to fall. Provisional estimates number them at 162 for 2012, down from 186 in 2011 and 212 in 2010.

An important development expected during the Irish Presidency is the adoption of a regulation setting out guidelines for the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T). In the current economic climate, TEN-T is one of the Presidency's priorities, as it aims to better target available resources and attract private sector investment in infrastructure.

Agreement on the guidelines will help to remove cross-border bottlenecks and streamline transport operations across the EU, thus supporting economic recovery. It will also contribute to upgrading infrastructure, which is vital for road safety. The Presidency hopes to reach agreement with the European Parliament on the proposed regulation, with a view to getting it adopted in the first half of 2013.

Better protection for haulage drivers

Another aspect of the Presidency's road safety work is securing agreement on a new tachograph regulation. Tachographs are fitted to vehicles to record such details as speed, distance driven and driver activity. They help to monitor compliance by haulage drivers with EU law on driving and rest times. Tachographs must be installed in all new vehicles weighing over 3.5 tonnes for goods transport and carrying more than nine people for passenger transport.

Proposed revisions to existing tachograph legislation aim to make fraud more difficult and reduce the burden on companies, while making use of such technological opportunities as satellite positioning. This should lead to improvements in the competitiveness of EU road transport. Improved compliance with driving time rules will better protect haulage drivers and road users in general.

Progress towards obtaining the agreement of the European Parliament and Member States on the Roadworthiness Package is another key road safety task for the Irish Presidency. The Package

comprises a set of proposed new rules on periodic vehicle testing, roadside checks and vehicle registration. The Commission's rationale for the proposals is that technical defects contribute heavily to collisions and the proposals are aimed at saving more than 1 200 lives a year and avoiding more than 36 000 collisions linked to vehicle failure.

At the Council, discussions on the part of the proposal for periodic vehicle testing concluded in December and a general approach was agreed which sets minimum standards to improve safety while minimising administrative burden and costs. The Irish Presidency hopes to reach agreement within the Council on the other elements within the Package. Negotiations on the Roadside Inspections proposal commence in mid-February. The main proposed changes to current requirements for roadside checks include:



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- introduction of targeted inspections based on the risk profile for vehicle operators;
- extension of the scope for checks to light commercial vehicles and their trailers;
- linking of the yearly number of roadside inspections to the number of registered relevant vehicles in a Member State, with at least 5 % of vehicles to be inspected;
- introduction of requirements for inspection of cargo securing.

At the European Parliament, discussions on all three elements of the proposal have started in parallel. An exchange of views with the Commission and a public hearing recently took place. Reports on each of the elements from the rapporteurs will be available by March and a plenary vote on the whole Roadworthiness Package is scheduled before the summer break.

For more information, please visit <http://www.eu2013.ie/>





International road safety conference to take place at Dublin Castle

An important event during the Irish Presidency is an annual International Conference on Road Safety, which is being organised by the Road Safety Authority (RSA), the body tasked with many road safety-related functions in Ireland. The Conference is to be held at Dublin Castle, in Dublin city centre, on Thursday 28 March.

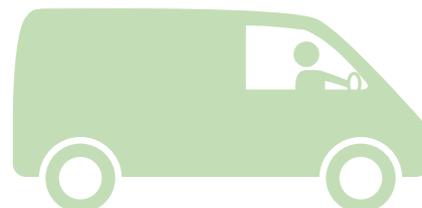
Traffic injuries are the main theme of the event, which will be addressed by road safety experts from across the EU. The Conference will comprise presentations examining ways of cutting injuries on the road. The main aim is to facilitate an exchange of good road safety practice among EU citizens.

Ireland will also launch its new Road Safety Strategy for 2013–20 at the Conference. It aims to make Ireland's roads as safe as those of the best performing Member States and will see Ireland move towards a safe systems approach to road safety, in line with overall

EU orientations. All measures in the Strategy are based on societal interests, effectiveness, proportionality and intervention costs. The main emphasis is on reduction of serious injuries.

Another event, with road safety implications, to take place under the Presidency is the Ninth European Congress on Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS). This is to be held at the Dublin Convention Centre on 4–7 June and focuses on optimising the benefits of ITS across the EU.

The RSA will also host a Euro Contrôle Route (ECR) Conference on Efficient and Effective Road Transport Enforcement at a time of Financial Crisis. This is to be held in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham, Dublin on 18 June.



For more information on the International Conference on Road Safety on 28 March, please visit
<http://www.eu2013.ie/events/event-items/rsainternationalconferenceonroadsafety-20130328/>



For further details on the European ITS Congress, please visit <http://www.itsineurope.com/its9/index.php>

Further details on the ECR Conference will be published on <http://www.euro-contrôle-route.eu>

Find out more...

If these subjects have revved up your interest, then check out the new road safety website at: ec.europa.eu/roadsafety

European Youth Forum for Road Safety (EYFRS) also has a Facebook page at: www.facebook.com/EYFRS

EYFRS has its own website at: ec.europa.eu/eyfrs
Visit these sites for inspiration and information.

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Published by: Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport | European Commission – BE-1049 Brussels
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