

Submission by Marian Harkin MEP TD

on

FITTING BLIND-SPOT MIRRORS ON EXISTING TRUCKS

A Consultation Paper

*Presented by the inland transport services
of the Directorate General for Energy and Transport*

Over the past couple of years, the issue of fatalities caused by blind-spots of Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) has received a great deal of coverage in Ireland, and much research and studies have been carried out.

The issue was first brought to my attention in the spring of 2005 when a constituent contacted me and asked what action could be taken at EU level to prevent the increasing loss of lives on the roads: in particular he referred to three recent road fatalities in my constituency of Ireland North and West which had been caused by pedestrians crossing roads and streets in front of HGVs while stopped in traffic - either at a set of traffic lights or otherwise. As such, I sought a way to bring this matter onto the agenda in the European Union.

At the time, a report on the EU Road Safety Action Plan was going through committee in the European Parliament, and with the support of the rapporteur, I successfully moved an amendment on the compulsory fitting of all Heavy Goods Vehicles with a mirror to eliminate the blind spot¹

I proceeded to seek support for this in the Council of the European Union, by writing to the Irish Minister for Transport, Martin Cullen. The Minister referred me to the Directive² which requires all new HGVs to be fitted with a particular type of mirror to eliminate the frontal blind spot. However, given the vast number of HGVs already in existence on Europe's roads - some 5 million according to your Consultation Paper, I was not satisfied that this was enough, and subsequently wrote to Mr. Hubert Gorbach, the Minister for Transport, Innovation and Technology in Austria - the Member State currently holding the Presidency of the Council.

¹ *Road Safety: Halving the Number of Road Accident Victims by 2010*, rapporteur Ari Vatanen, A6-0225/2005 - amendment attached

² Directive 2003/97/EC on the Approximation of the Laws of the Member States relating to the type-approval of Devices for Indirect Vision and of Vehicles equipped with these Devices; OJ L 25 29/1/2004 p1

I was most pleased to learn that Road Safety was named as one of the priorities of that presidency, but nonetheless I continued to lobby the European Commission and other stakeholders on this issue.

I was therefore delighted to find out that there was finally a move on the retro-fitting of HGVs with this blind spot mirror by way of a consultation process being launched by the European Commission. Spokespeople for the Department of Transport in Ireland had uttered time and time again that this was a matter for the EU and not for the National Government Departments. On learning of this consultation process, I tried to get the word out to as many people as possible in Ireland - both road hauliers associations and city and county coroners alike. All of these had expressed their concern at the lack of a blind spot mirror for HGVs and the simple prevention of the loss of lives on our roads by fitting such a mirror.

I wish to commend the European Commission Inland Transport Services in DG TREN for the research which has been carried out in the lead up to this consultation - both in terms of the practicalities of fitting these mirrors and the costs attached. I feel that much greater emphasis, however, should be placed on the safety aspect of this, and personally feel that whatever the costs, the benefits far outweigh these if we can prevent even the loss of one life. One only has to look at the following facts to realise that the need for action on blind spot mirrors for HGVs is great:

- Between 2000-2005, 17 cyclists have been killed on Dublin's streets, of whom 10 have been killed in collisions with HGVs³
- "HGVs accounted for 100% of cyclist deaths in Dublin in 2005. Of the 3 Cyclists killed, all were crushed by HGVs. An effective HGV management plan would mean that we could expect to reduce cyclists deaths to zero in the city"⁴
- Jury in Dublin City Coroner's Court recommended that additional mirrors and sensors be mandatory to help eliminate driver blind spots in large vehicles⁵
- "The cost of retrofitting a HGV with a safety mirror can be as little as a tank of diesel" - Minister of State in the Irish Department of Transport, Mr. Ivor Callely⁶
- During the period of 1996 and 2001, 43% of pedestrians and 19% of cyclists that were killed on Ireland's roads were in accidents involving HGVs in urban areas, while 92 pedestrians and 29 cyclists died in collisions with HGVs in both rural and urban areas⁷

³ *The Irish Times* "Lower HGV city speed limit urged", Frank McDonald, figures taken from The Dublin Cycling Campaign Submission for the management of HGVs in Dublin) 31/01/2006

⁴ (David Maher, PRO of Dublin Cycling Campaign, "Press Release: Cyclists launch plan to curtail HGV slaughter on Dublin's roads", 31 Jan 2006)

⁵ Stated by Dr. Brian Farrell, Dublin City Coroner on 19/01/2006

⁶ Dept of Transport Press Release, 1/5/2005

⁷ Figures taken from Ireland's National Safety Council study carried out between 1996 and 2001, as quoted in *The Irish Times*, "Cyclops' mirrors recommended for trucks", Paddy Logue, 8/3/06)

- Only half of the 16,000 HGVs in Ireland are equipped with front-view mirrors⁸
- "A pedestrian approximately 1.5 metres in height would not be seen within approximately a two-metre radius of the front and side of the vehicle"⁹
- Irelands National Safety Council launched the campaign - "Stay clear of a truck's danger zone" as a warning to pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists. They claimed that older people were most at risk and that over 5 years there were 974 fatal and serious injury crashes involving trucks and pedestrians¹⁰.

I think all will agree that the facts and figures here speak for themselves and stress the need for action and the benefits to be obtained by all European citizens by the retro-fitting of all Heavy Goods Vehicles, and I therefore caution the European commission against making too many exemptions to future legislation.

⁸ figure given in The Irish Times, "*Cyclops' mirrors recommended for trucks*", Paddy Logue, 8/3/06

⁹ - (Garda Anthony Kelly at the inquest into the death of 54-year-old Bernadette Molloy at a pedestrian crossing following a collision with a truck, as quoted in The Irish Times, "*Cyclops' mirrors recommended for trucks*", Paddy Logue, 8/3/06)

¹⁰ Published (30/6/05) - See pdf poster attached