

Opinion of the Transport Committee

2010/11:TU10

**Towards a European road safety area: policy orientations on road safety 2011-2020**

Summary

This is the Committee's opinion on the European Commission's Communication *Towards a European road safety area: policy orientations on road safety 2011-2020*, COM(2010) 389. The aim of the Communication is to create a general governance framework and objectives which should guide national or local strategies for road safety policy in the EU.

The Committee welcomes the fact that road safety is being taken up at European level and that the Commission stresses that a coordinated approach should be taken towards road safety. The view that the final responsibility for road safety lies with the creators of the system is important. The Committee therefore considers that greater emphasis should be placed on this in the Commission's future work, while at the same time it is important to stress drivers' own responsibility. Technical solutions, in particular alcohol interlock devices, have a key role to play in continuing to improve road safety. The Committee is of the view that successful technological development requires close cooperation between authorities and industry.

It also wishes to draw attention to the importance of speed in improving road safety. It welcomes the fact that the Commission states that education and training for drivers must take account of elderly people's right to mobility. The Committee is pleased to note that Sweden continues to have a high level of road safety compared with other countries. The Commission has previously noted Sweden's good results with regard to road safety. The Committee is of the view that Sweden should be able to lead by example and spread best practice in countries that do not have similarly high levels of road safety.

2010/11:TU10

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The Committee's proposal for a Parliament decision

**Towards a European road safety area: policy orientations on road safety 2011-2020**

Parliament adds the Committee's opinion to the file.

Stockholm, 14 December 2010

For the Transport Committee

Anders Ygeman

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## **Description of the item**

### **The item and its preparation**

After consulting the group leaders, the President has decided that the Communication from the European Commission *Towards a European road safety area: policy orientations on road safety 2011-2020* is to be examined by the Committee pursuant to Chapter 10, Section 5 of Riksdag Act (1974:153). As a result, on 17 November 2010 the Chamber referred the Communication to the Transport Committee.

The Committee has also received the explanatory memorandum (2009/10:FPM126) *Policy orientations in the EU on road safety 2011-2020*.

### **Background**

On 2 June 2003 the Commission adopted its 3rd European action programme for road safety aimed at halving the number of road deaths by 2010. The programme also contained 62 proposals for concrete actions in the field of vehicle safety, safety of infrastructure and users' safety. An evaluation of the programme shows that, although the initial target is not likely to be met by the end of 2010, the programme has been a strong catalyst of efforts made by Member States to improve road safety.

In 2009, more than 35 000 people died on the roads of the European Union and no fewer than 1 500 000 persons were injured. The cost for society in the EU was estimated at approximately EUR 130 billion in 2009.

### **Main contents of the Communication**

#### *Three principles*

The aim of the Communication is to create a general governance framework and objectives which should guide national or local strategies. It begins by setting out three principles for work at European level to improve road safety. The first principle is to strive for the highest road safety standards throughout Europe. The Commission states that citizens must be placed at the heart of its action and that they must be encouraged to take primary responsibility for their safety and the safety of others. The second principle is an integrated approach to road safety. The Communication notes that road safety has close links with several policies, such as energy, environment, employment and education. The third principle concerns subsidiarity, proportionality and shared responsibility. The Commission considers that commitment and concrete actions will be required at the level of the European authorities, the Member States, regional and local bodies and the actors in civil society.

#### *The quantitative target is maintained*

With a view to achieving the objective of creating a common road safety area, the Commission proposes to continue with the quantitative target of halving the number of road deaths in the European Union. The deadline is 2020, starting in 2010. Member States are encouraged to contribute, through their national road safety strategy, to the achievement of the common objective, taking into account their specific starting points, needs and circumstances.

The Commission states that this approach should reduce the disparities between Member States and lead to a more uniform level of road safety within the EU.

The Commission also notes that, at this stage, a European target for reducing serious injuries is not possible due to the lack of a common definition of severe and minor injuries.

#### *The strategic element - the road user is the first link*

The Commission proposes as a strategic element that the road user be seen as the first link and that, for this reason, education, training and enforcement are essential. However, the road safety system also has to take into account human error and inappropriate behaviour and correct it as much as possible. The consequences of incidents must be prevented and limited, in particular for the most vulnerable users.

#### *Seven strategic targets*

Seven objectives have been identified for the next decade. For each of these objectives, actions at EU and national level are proposed.

### **Objective 1: Improve education and training of road users**

The Commission states that the aim is to promote pre-test learning. The Commission also notes that the driving test should include risk awareness and energy-efficient driving. The Commission states that it will work, in cooperation with Member States as appropriate, on the development of a common educational and training road safety strategy including notably the integration of private, accompanied driving as well as common minimum requirements for tutors and driving instructors.

### **Objective 2: Increase enforcement of road rules**

The Commission stresses that increased coordination helps make controls significantly more efficient and that most effective results are obtained by combining control policy with users' information. The Commission will work together with the European Parliament and the Council to establish a cross-border exchange of information in the field of road safety. It will also work towards developing a common road safety enforcement strategy, including the possibility of introducing speed limiters in light commercial vehicles, making the use of alcohol interlock devices obligatory in certain specific cases and the establishing national implementation plans.

### **Objective 3: Safer road infrastructure**

The Commission points out that the highest number of fatalities occurs on rural and urban roads. Only 6% of accidents occur on motorways. The Commission will ensure that European funds are granted only to infrastructure compliant with the road safety and tunnel safety Directives. It will also promote the application of the relevant principles on infrastructure safety management to secondary roads of Member States, in particular through the exchange of best practices.

### **Objective 4: Safer vehicles**

The Commission notes that the period covered by the 3rd road safety action programme has seen considerable progress in vehicle safety. However, other vehicles, in particular

motorcycles, have not been subject to the same attention. The Commission intends to make proposals to encourage progress on the active and passive safety of vehicles and on the progressive harmonisation and strengthening of roadworthiness tests and technical roadside inspections. It also intends to further assess the impact and benefits of synchronised systems between vehicles and infrastructure.

#### **Objective 5: Promote the use of modern technology to increase road safety**

The Commission considers that Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) have the potential to play a considerable role in improving traffic safety. However, the Commission notes that, in spite of their positive contribution to road safety, the development of ITS also raises a number of safety concerns, for example distraction, which will require further consideration. Within the context of the implementation of the ITS Action Plan and of the proposed ITS Directive, the Commission will cooperate with the Member States with a view to evaluating the feasibility of retrofitting commercial vehicles and private cars with Advanced Driver Assistance Systems. Steps will also be taken to accelerate the deployment of e-Call (the automatic emergency call service from European vehicles following an accident) and examine its extension to other vehicles.

#### **Objective 6: Improve emergency and post-injuries services**

The Commission notes that, while the number of fatalities decreased between 2001 and 2010, the number of injured people is still very high and that reducing the number of injuries should be one of the priority actions within Europe. Reducing the seriousness of injuries from road accidents requires a range of diverse actions, such as ITS and improving emergency aid. In collaboration with Member States and other actors involved in road safety, the Commission will propose the setting-up of a global strategy of action on road injuries and first aid.

#### **Objective 7: Protect vulnerable road users**

The Commission states that the high number of fatalities and serious injuries faced by vulnerable road users such as riders of motorcycles, mopeds, cyclists and pedestrians are significant. In 2008 they represented 45% of all road deaths. It notes that it is the most difficult to attain a significant reduction in accidents and fatalities among users of two-wheelers. The Commission also points out that the ageing of the population is putting particular emphasis on the need to assess older people's vulnerability in traffic and that focused research efforts are needed, including on medical criteria for the assessment of fitness-to-drive. The Commission will make appropriate proposals with a view to monitoring and further developing technical standards for the protection of vulnerable road users, including powered-two wheelers in vehicle inspections and increasing the safety of cyclists and other vulnerable road users, for example by encouraging the establishment of adequate infrastructures. It concludes by noting that Member States should develop information, communication and dialogue between road users and with the competent authorities. The Commission states that it will contribute to this effort.

#### *Implementation of the orientations*

The Commission intends to give priority to monitoring the full and correct implementation of the EU road safety *acquis* by Member States. It also intends to examine the need for common principles for technical road accident investigation. The Commission will work closely with the Member States to promote modes of cooperation to increase the safety level of Member

States, improve data collection and analysis as regards accidents and develop the role of the European Road Safety Observatory.

### *Conclusion*

The role of the Commission is to make proposals on matters where the EU is competent and, in all other cases, to support initiatives taken at various levels, to encourage the exchange of information, to identify and promote the best results obtained and to follow carefully the progress achieved.

### **Explanatory memorandum**

The Government Office's explanatory memorandum 'Policy orientations on road safety 2011-2020' (2009/10:FPM126) sets out Sweden's main views on the Commission's Communication.

The government welcomes the fact that attention is being focused on road safety by setting a target at EU level. The government stresses that an integrated approach is important in improving road safety. It would like to see more emphasis placed on the idea that greater consideration should be given to road users when building vehicles and infrastructure. It also stresses the significance of alcohol interlock devices in improving road safety and the work the government is doing in this regard. Lastly, the government finds that the Communication lacks initiatives that support those Member States that have made most progress in improving road safety.

It notes that the Communication has been sent to the authorities concerned and that the Belgian Presidency has announced that Council conclusions on the proposal were to be adopted in autumn 2010.

## **The Committee's examination**

### **The principles of subsidiarity and proportionality**

The Commission states that, in accordance with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, commitment and concrete actions will be required at the level of the European authorities, the Member States, regional and local bodies and the actors in civil society. The Committee agrees with this assessment and considers that all stakeholders will need to act within their area of responsibility.

### **The Committee's examination**

By way of introduction, the Committee wishes to stress the positive effect of addressing road safety at European level. It is important to note, as the Commission does, the political weight of this area, and the Committee supports the Commission's view that that a coordinated approach should be taken towards road safety. At the same time, the Committee wishes to stress the importance in terms of subsidiarity of carrying out measures to improve road safety at the right level.

In autumn 1997 the Swedish Parliament adopted the 'zero-tolerance' policy for road safety (Bill 1996/97:137, Committee report 1997/98:TU4, Riksdag Communication 1997/98:11). The idea of zero tolerance is based on a number of principles. One is that, from an ethical point of view, it is unacceptable that a person is killed or seriously injured on the roads. To achieve this the transport system must be built in a way that takes account of peoples' needs. Responsibility for safety must be shared between those who design and build the system and those who use it. However, it is those who design and build the system who bear the ultimate responsibility and may need to adapt the system to users not fulfilling their responsibilities. The Committee is of the view that this is important in all efforts to improve road safety and therefore considers it appropriate for it to be accorded greater importance in the Commission's future work in this area. The Committee also considers it important for road users themselves to take responsibility for their behaviour on the road, and it therefore welcomes the fact that the Commission identifies this and has included improved education and training as one of the strategic objectives. In this regard, the Committee wishes to point out that Sweden recently introduced extended risk awareness training covering factors that affect behaviour behind the wheel and the risk of accidents when on the road.

The Commission notes in its Communication that a European target for reducing serious injuries is not possible due to the lack of a common definition of severe injuries. On this point the Committee notes that Sweden has defined severe injuries as an injury to a person which results in permanent loss of health equivalent to 1% or more 'medical invalidity' (Bill 2008/98:93, p. 38).

The Committee considers that technical solutions have a key role to play in continuing to improve road safety. This is true both of technologies in vehicles and other types of driver-support. The Committee is of the view that successful technological development requires close cooperation between authorities and industry.

The Committee considers the issue of alcohol interlock devices to be of particular importance. The Commission states in the Communication that it intends to work towards the possibility



of making alcohol interlock devices obligatory in certain specific cases. The Committee finds it important for alcohol interlock devices to be fitted to a wide range of vehicles. Alcohol interlock devices can help people convicted of drink driving to remain in the driving licence system while at the same time preventing them from driving again under the influence of alcohol. The Committee also considers that there must be broad cooperation between a range of measures in order to combat drink-driving, including the use of alcohol interlock devices, employers' drugs policies, good monitoring, and appropriate consequences and treatment. Sweden's long-term goal is for alcohol interlock devices, or other technology that prevents people under the influence from driving, to become standard in all new vehicles. The Committee considers that more user-friendly and less expensive alcohol interlock devices must be developed if widespread use is to be achieved. One way in which to reduce the risk of drivers being drunk behind the wheel is for alcohol interlock devices to be made a quality assurance criterion for transport in the EU's forthcoming road safety programme.

The Committee finds that the question of speed is of particular importance for road safety. Speed is often a decisive factor in the consequences of an accident and also affects the driver's chances of avoiding one. It is of utmost importance for speed limits to be well thought-through and that they are complied with. There are many advantages to the Commission, in its role as a collector of information and promoter of cooperation, focusing on the issue of speed.

The Committee notes that the Commission highlights the ageing population and the question of maintaining older people's aptitude for driving. On this point the Committee recalls that the elderly as a group are no more likely to cause an accident than other groups. However, as older bodies are more vulnerable, the elderly are over-represented in accident statistics. The Committee is of the view that more research should be carried out into road safety and ageing. It is also pleased to note that the Commission states that education and training for drivers must take account of elderly people's right to mobility.

As regards vehicle inspections, the Committee considers that an effective inspection system will have a significant impact on road safety. At the same time, it is important to balance inspection activities against the benefit to society. The Committee notes that the text of the Communication on the inspection of two-wheelers does not include the inspection of mopeds.

Lastly, the Committee wishes to point out that the Communication lacks initiatives for countries that have already made considerable progress with regard to road safety. It considers it appropriate for future work in this area to include these countries.

The Commission has already noted in its White Paper *European transport policy for 2010: time to decide* (COM(2001) 370) that Sweden has adopted a 'zero-tolerance' policy. In the White Paper, the Commission stresses that if all countries achieved the same result as Sweden it would be possible to reduce the number of road deaths by 20 000. The Committee notes with satisfaction that Sweden continues to have a very high level of road safety. It should be possible for Sweden to act as an example and spread best practice in countries that do not have similarly high levels of road safety. It considers that the Commission should reflect on how the countries that have made most progress in road safety could help spread knowledge to other countries and set a good example. The hope is that consequently more countries will be able to improve their road safety levels.

In summary, the Committee welcomes the Commission's proposals for policy orientations on road safety in the EU. The Commission's frameworks and objectives will lead us to raise our

targets for road safety, something that is both desirable and necessary, and will thereby help create a sustainable transport system in the European Union.