European Transport Safety Council

NEWS RELEASE

Lower speeds: Win-Win for Road Safety and the Environment

24 April 2008, Brussels **– Speeding remains the single biggest contributory factor of traffic death and injury across Europe, making up as much as one third of the number of fatal accidents[1]. Speeding also contributes to global warming through disproportionate carbon dioxide emissions. Managing speed on European roads can therefore help reduce road carnage and mitigate global warming consequences, ultimately creating a safer and healthier environment for people. This is the conclusion of the ETSC [2] Policy Paper *Managing Speed: Towards safe and sustainable road transport.***

Excessive speed has a singularly devastating impact on the health and safety of road users, increasing both the risk of a crash and the severity of resulting injuries. On average, a 5% increase in speed leads to a 10% rise in injury accidents, a 15% rise in serious injury accidents, and a 20% rise in fatal accidents[3]. The consequences are even more serious for pedestrians: while in a 30 km/h-speed collision 5% of pedestrians are killed, at 50 km/h the number goes up to 45%, and at 65 km/h to 85%[4].

Current concern over climate change has also highlighted the role of road transport as the largest polluter among all transport modes. It generates about one fifth of the EU's carbon dioxide emissions, and its share has been rising unlike that of other sectors[5]. Properly enforced national speed limits could cut carbon emissions, e.g. by 1 mn tonnes in the UK[6] and by 3 mn tonnes in France[7]. In Germany, a 100 km/h or 120 km/h limit on motorways would reduce CO2 emissions from cars by 10% or 20% respectively[8].

Speeding remains the most widespread offence. The OECD estimates that at any one moment 50% of drivers are exceeding legal speed limits. Unlike other safety violations, such as drink driving or non-use of seat belt, enforcing speed compliance requires the majority of drivers to change their behaviour.

A 'policy mix' is necessary to bring about a "culture of speed compliance". Infrastructure measures such as safe road design and road safety audits can do much to reduce excessive and inappropriate speed. Tougher speed enforcement, be it through more police on the roads or the use of latest automated control technologies (safety cameras), is essential and could save up to 5,800 lives, according to the European Commission. Safety cameras offer high level of continuous and widespread enforcement. EU member states should follow the examples of such countries as the UK, the Netherlands and France which have achieved great success in bringing down the rate of traffic deaths thanks to these devices. New in-car speed assistance technologies[9] can also reduce CO2 emissions by 8%[10] and at the same time significantly decrease the number of severe crashes.

"Reducing speed on European roads can help to achieve simultaneously two key EU targets: halving road deaths by 2010 and reducing CO2 emissions by 2020," said Gabriel Simcic, ETSC Project Officer. *"The widespread nature of speeding offences also means that the potential for improvement is huge. Just by driving a bit more slowly every day each of us can contribute personally to saving lives and creating a healthier planet. It is not often such great causes can be achieved with so little sacrifice."*

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Notes to Editors:

(1) OECD/ ECMT, 2006

(2) The **European Transport Safety Council (ETSC)** is a Brussels-based independent non-profit making organisation dedicated to the reduction of the number and severity of transport crashes in Europe. ETSC seeks to identify and promote research-based measures with a high safety potential. It brings together 39 national and international organisations concerned with transport safety from across Europe. www.etsc.be

(3) Aarts and van Schagen 2006, based on Nilsson 1982

(4) ETSC, 1995

(5) While the EU-25 reduced overall emissions of greenhouse gases by almost 5% between 1990 and 2004, CO2 emissions from road transport rose by 26% (OECD/ECMT, 2007)

(6) Anable et al., 2006

(7) According to France's Environment Ministry

(8) Umweltbundesamt, 2003

(9) Intelligent Speed Assistance (ISA) technologies are a tool that brings speed limit information into the vehicle, typically through the use of GPS Devices.

(10) In the UK alone. Carsten et al. (2001)

Forthcoming event:

This year, ETSC and bfu (the Swiss council for accident prevention) organise a joint event with a special focus on speed:

10th bfu forum and 10th ETSC Lecture on 'Speed'

Thursday, 25 September 2008, 3.00 p.m. – 5.30 p.m., Stade de Suisse, Berne

To reserve a place please send an email to: j.schlaefli@bfu.ch. The programme with registration details will be sent to you at the end of June.