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ETSC URGES EU LEGISLATION ON SAFER CAR FRONTS

Next Tuesday, 6th February, the European Commission will take evidence from the car industry, MEPs, scientists, consumer organisations, the ETSC and other interested parties at a special hearing in Brussels on making cars safer for pedestrians and whether to introduce legislation or a voluntary agreement. The hearing has been organised by Enterprise Commissioner Erkki Liikanen in close association with Transport Commissioner Loyola de Palacio. The European Commission agreed on 21 December 2000 that the car industry should be given until June 2001, to negotiate a voluntary agreement, otherwise they would bring forward a legislative proposal.

ETSC wants to see a Directive mandating the 4 legislative tests because:

1. This could save annually over 2,000 lives and 18,000 serious injuries – around 20% of all EU fatal and serious pedestrian and cyclist injuries.
2. These tests developed by EEVC (bringing together government and national research laboratories) have been scientifically established and tested over a 22 year EU funded research and development programme.
3. These tests have been ready since the early 1990s and have been used in Commission-funded consumer information programmes since 1996. Tests show that despite information on the injury problems, test methods and design possibilities, the European car industry has not acted voluntarily to provide safer car fronts for pedestrians and cyclists.
4. ETSC agrees with the European Commission that this legislative action would be cost-effective (EC road safety communication March, 2000).
5. ETSC agrees with the European Parliament that legislating for the 4 tests is the top road safety priority (Parliament's resolution January 2001).
6. The tests are feasible, demonstrated already in 1985 and by one car model now on the road. Thus the Council of Ministers have also urged early legislation (June 2000).
7. A draft legislative proposal exists and was translated into 11 EU languages by the Commission 12 months ago.

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ETSC opposes the voluntary agreement proposed by industry because:

1. It will fail to deliver a high level of protection and, paradoxically, could lead to less safe designs than at present.
2. It will cut the overall level of protection given by the legislative tests by at least 50%. The number of tests to be passed would be reduced and key requirements would be weakened. This could lead to worse upper leg injuries and more disabling knee injuries than at present.
3. The lead time proposed by the European car industry for a voluntary agreement is still years away and would require the agreement of other manufacturing associations around the world.
4. How could compliance with a 'voluntary' or 'negotiated' agreement be ensured in this case to guarantee public safety.
5. There would be no formal public scrutiny of the important technical detail of any final voluntary agreement since this deal would not have to be approved, as is the case for most vehicle safety measures, by the European Parliament or the Council of Ministers. Experience shows that such scrutiny leads to better safety.

Jeanne Breen, ETSC's Executive Director said today:

"We can't see the industry moving sufficiently far, on a voluntary basis, towards delivering the protection offered by the four proposed legislative tests. We will, therefore, be renewing our call to the Commission to come forward with this life-saving legislation. Past experience with the front and side impact crash test legislation for car occupant safety shows that only when legislation is decided will manufacturers show us what they can do.

Given the potential annual saving of 2,000 lives a year, an estimate accepted by the Commission, we've already missed the opportunity to save over 16,000 lives since the EU-funded work was ready for implementation. Every further month of delay in introducing a Directive bears a heavy cost – the lives of around 170 EU citizens."

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1. ETSC will publish its technical contribution to the hearing on Tuesday on www.etsc.be to be presented by Professor Adrian Hobbs, Chairman of ETSC's Vehicle Safety Working Party.
2. A special February edition of ETSC's newsletter CRASH presenting the background to safer car fronts for pedestrians is enclosed