

Road Safety Front runner takes EU helm: French Presidency of the EU

This Memorandum briefly outlines ETSC's priorities for the French Presidency of the EU and presents our recommendations on key EU policy dossiers.

ETSC(1) welcomes the news that road safety will be one of the top priorities on the Transport agenda during the French Presidency of the EU. Strong leadership is needed to bring about renewed efforts ahead of 2010. The EU is likely to miss its target of halving road deaths between 2001 and 2010. This dark prognosis is underlined with another piece of bad news. For the first time since 2001, 2007 saw no reduction in the total number of deaths in the EU. Following this disappointing year with tragic impacts for many more European citizens strong action is sorely needed. The road safety community will be watching closely to see how France prioritises EU road safety actions in the last year before the EU deadline to halve road deaths between 2001 and 2010. 2009 will also be the year when the EU will start thinking about a new target and a new strategy for its 4th Road Safety Action Programme (RSAP) to tackle the challenges of saving lives on Europe's roads beyond 2010. At a European level only very few of the measures set out in the ambitious 3rd Road Safety Action Programme have been achieved at all. Clearly road safety deserves a boost to increase the momentum in the penultimate year before consideration of new actions. On the legislative timetable key to measuring the success of its Presidency will be reaching agreement on a Directive to introduce cross border enforcement on Europe's roads.

France has made exemplary progress since 2001 in reducing deaths on its roads and is not letting up the pressure either. Between 2001 and 2007 the number of road deaths has dropped by 43%, which represents the best progress of any EU country over this period. France sends an important message to less well performing countries: take heart. Progress is possible wherever you stand. Also that political commitment is key to achieving long lasting results. Alongside political will from the highest level came a new "Zero Tolerance" in speeding offences and the introduction of a fully automated speed management system. This led to an improvement of traffic law enforcement in France and "ending drivers feeling of impunity".

Following on from the French government's previous policy to "fight against road violence" earlier this year President Sarkozy proposed a whole raft of new and forward thinking measures to tackle deaths on the roads. For combating drink driving this includes the introduction of alcoholock rehabilitation programmes and alcoholocks in all school buses. The focus on speeding remains with more fully automated speed cameras being rolled out. Police will also have the possibility to confiscate the vehicle if the driver is speeding at over 50 km/h beyond the set speed limit and if it is the driver's second offence or if they are driving without a license. France is aiming to reach a target of no more than 3,000 deaths per year by 2010 (in 2007 this was 4,622).

Cross border enforcement of traffic law in the field of road safety

ETSC welcomes the news that the French Presidency will place enforcement of road traffic law high on its political agenda. It should engage in discussions with other Member States and the European Parliament in order to push ahead with reaching agreement on this important dossier. France's own success has been much down to an increased presence of Police on the roads and rigorous enforcement. However France too faces a problem of how to tackle non-resident drivers. In France, as in other transit countries, their dangerous behaviour can lead to road accidents, and secondly it raises criticism as Police are not always able to apply the sanctions fairly on them as on the resident French citizens.

ETSC welcomes the new legislative proposal that will enable EU drivers to be identified and thus prosecuted for offences committed in a Member State other than the one where their vehicle is registered. The Directive is needed for in an increasingly mobile, integrated and enlarged EU, where non-resident drivers make up an ever increasing part of the traffic flow. If road traffic violations are committed EU citizens are entitled to fair and equal treatment in whichever country they are travelling. Also with the growth of automated speed camera systems it will be

particularly important to ensure a system which enables countries to follow up speeding offences across borders. Current co-operation agreements exist in the form of bi-lateral and multi-lateral agreements. However they are often not able to deal with the increasingly complex cross-border problems posed by traffic offenders.

The proposal should be extended to include an EU wide reference framework for convergence of enforcement best practices in the areas of speeding, drink driving and seat belt use. A cost benefit analysis carried out for the European Commission assessed that increased enforcement in these three priority areas could reduce road deaths annually by 14,000 in the EU 15 (even more in EU 27). The Directive should encourage all EU Member States to consider improving their quality of enforcement. Average speeds and numbers of speed limit violations remain high across Europe. Therefore ETSC calls on the Presidency to take the lead in the promotion of a new approach aimed at addressing the speed problem. Given the fact that speed reduction would directly affect the level of CO2 emissions, it should be a measure to consider strongly within the framework of the Presidency's environmental and energy strategies for transport.

"Plan Climat" for Europe: Speed Reductions and CO2 Emissions

France has also been one of the flag bearers in linking safety gains of reducing speeds to lower CO2 emissions. In its "Plan Climat" a measure to increase compliance with speed limits was found to bring about a high level of reduction of a total of 3 million tones of CO2 per annum. Recent developments include regions in France lowering speed limits to bring about higher levels of safety but also lower emissions. The French Presidency should also raise the issue that speed reduction on Europe's roads would also directly lower the level of CO2 emissions. Road transport generates about one fifth of the EU's CO2 emissions, with passenger cars responsible for around 12% and these emissions have risen between 1990 and 2004 by 26%. Efforts to promote 'Eco-driving'

and speed limit enforcement can also contribute to reducing CO2 emissions. Furthermore the Presidency should look to promote intelligent speed assistance as a tool to save lives and reduce greenhouse gases in the EU. Legislation which will contribute to reducing speed on Europe's road including the Directive on Cross Border Enforcement must be fast-tracked within the context of tackling not only safety but also the EU's climate change agenda. The European Union is committed under the Kyoto Protocol to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and this March 2007 EU leaders committed to a 20-30% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions overall by 2020. The French government could use their Presidency as an opportunity to also stress the synergies in linking road safety and the sustainability agenda.

4th RSAP and beyond 2010

The French Presidency should consider the need for a new European wide target for action on improving road safety in the EU beyond 2010. A new target also needs the formulation of a new 4th Road Safety Action Programme with a set of measures linked to milestones and monitoring mechanisms. Part of this process is a review of the achievements within road safety at a European level over the past decade. The last decade has seen big changes in the EU with enlargement and an increasing imbalance of road risk. We should learn from the experience of implementing the 3rd RSAP and therefore adopt clear and strict monitoring and accountability mechanisms, for the 4th RSAP to be achieved.

Safer Car Fronts for Pedestrian Protection

The Pedestrian Protection Directive will already nearly have been agreed by the time the French Presidency takes office. However, it should also prioritise reaching a final agreement on adopting pedestrian-friendly legislation. As many as 8,000 vulnerable road users, pedestrians and cyclists are killed and 300,000 more are injured on EU roads every year. The technical requirements for the construction and functioning of vehicles

and frontal protection systems are laid down in the proposed Regulation on pedestrian protection. This replaces Directive 2003/102/EC on the protection of pedestrians in the event of a collision with a motor vehicle, and Directive 2005/66/EC related to the use of frontal protection systems on motor vehicles. Passive safety requirements (vehicle design) and also active safety measures such as Brake Assist System (BAS) are in the content of this Regulation. ETSC warns that if the current proposal is adopted, the new pedestrian safety requirements will be weakened compared to those laid down in the original Directive currently in force. Crucial crash test procedures would be changed or kept for monitoring purposes only. ETSC therefore urges the French Presidency holder to stand by the proposals contained in the TRL report (2004), which formed the basis of the current Directive 2003/102/EC into force.

Infrastructure Safety

The Infrastructure Safety Directive will also nearly have been agreed upon by the time the French Presidency takes office. ETSC stresses the need for a swift adoption of this legislation which could save 600 lives a year (according to Commission estimates). It could provide for a substantial improvement of the road network, introducing an EU system of high risk sites, road safety audits and safety impact assessment on the Trans-European Road Network. Infrastructure should make it obvious what sort of behavior and speed is expected from the drivers. The layout of a road should automatically enforce the desired speed and reduce the probability of a crash and their severity. The implementation of the Directive would be an important step to helping the EU Member States to reach a new target after 2010.

Notes to editors:

(1) The European Transport Safety Council (ETSC) is a Brussels-based non-profit making organisation dedicated to the reduction of transport crashes and casualties in Europe. ETSC seeks to identify and promote effective measures on the basis of international scientific research and best practice. The Council brings together 40 international and national organisations concerned with transport safety from across Europe.

For more information contact:

ETSC Policy Director Ellen Townsend at ellen.townsend@etsc.be 0032 (0)2 230 41 06

European Transport Safety Council
Av des Celtes 20 - B-1040 Brussels
Tel. + 32 (0) 2 230 4106 - Fax. + 32 (0) 2 230 4215
Internet: www.etsc.eu