

EU Road Safety Policy to top Austrian Transport Agenda

This Memorandum will briefly outline ETSC's priorities for the Austrian Presidency and suggest how the Presidency may restart progress on European road safety policy.

ETSC hopes that the Austrian government's statements to put transport safety high on the Presidency agenda will be translated into concrete achievements. The Presidency provides the Austrian government the opportunity to place safety centre stage in EU transport policy making and highlight its own considerable progress in this area.

Indeed, Austria takes over the driving seat of the EU at an auspicious moment for the future of road transport safety. The publication of the Mid-term Review of the 3rd Road Safety Action Programme, initially due by the end of 2005, likely only to be published beginning of next year, calls for a strong response from the Member States to be considered during the first half of 2006. The Austrian Presidency should therefore:

Take the political leadership

Action is needed for safer roads in the enlarged European Union. Despite the fact that Europe has both an ambitious road safety target and a comprehensive strategy, there is an increasing imbalance of road risk. The current toleration of disproportionate levels of deaths and injury on the roads in the EU has to be shaken; much of them are known to be avoidable at affordable cost.

Subsidiarity should not be invoked as an excuse for Member States to resist European legislative proposals that could help reducing the burden of road accidents on society and the individuals. Indeed, Austria should ensure that the Austrian's commitment to road safety established in the Austrian Road Safety Programme 2002-2010 is duplicated across Europe.

Give a strong response to the Mid-term Review's challenges

The Mid-term Review of the 3rd Road Safety Action Programme is set to be characterised by an increased inequality of road risk across the EU. The Review will give an outline for each of the Member States of their road safety performance. The Austrian Presidency should therefore ensure that the discussions on the Mid-term Review focus on what can be done by all Member States, as well as how those with the greatest challenge can be assisted in improving their levels of road risk.

The Mid-term Review should also be accompanied by concrete policy initiatives such as the introduction of the so-called infrastructure package.

Provide safer road infrastructure

Besides the vehicle and the driver, infrastructure is the third pillar of any comprehensive road safety work. Estimates show that bad road design has an impact on one out of three accidents. ETSC welcomes the Commission's intention to introduce a framework Directive on road infrastructure safety under the Austrian Presidency. This Directive should introduce a system for the harmonised management of "high risk sites", road safety inspections and road safety audits for roads on the Trans-European network.

As part of this, the EU Presidency should also consider safety audits and safety impact assessment to be a condition for all EU-funded infrastructures. Moreover the Presidency should ensure that the European Commission fulfils its commitment to developing best practice guidelines in the fields of urban safety management, speed reduction, low cost measures and safety audit.

Adopt the driving licence Directive

ETSC is concerned about the delay in the adoption of the Third Driving Licence Directive due to the resistance of some Member States at the Transport Council in June 2005. A swift adoption of the revised Driving Licence Directive is urgently needed to increase the European minimum standards in driver licensing, especially among novice drivers, and improve cross-border enforcement of traffic laws, as well as the fight against fraudulent access to driving licences.

As part of this, the Presidency has to promote the dissemination of Best practices between Member States regarding driver training. With, for instance, the introduction of the multiple-phase driving licence, or the rehabilitation model to help recovering their licence those who lose it due to repeated alcohol or drug offences, the Austrian government assumes the role of a forerunner within the EU regarding the development of measures for these high-risk drivers.

Initiate a cross border enforcement Directive

ETSC supports the declaration of Vice-President Barrot on the Commission's intention to introduce a cross-border enforcement Directive. In France, approximately 15% of offenders escaped the traffic laws because their vehicles were registered outside France. The Presidency should therefore support Member States who are forging ahead with a network of information exchange on vehicle registration and driver licensing to facilitate the work of policemen.

The Austrian Presidency should nonetheless ensure that EU Transport Ministers continue to account for the progress made so far in implementing the Commission's Recommendation on enforcement in their Member States.

Improve vehicle safety

The Austrian Presidency should also support national and local authorities' efforts to promote the use of in-vehicle technologies, such as seat belt reminders and alcohol interlocks, and stimulate the development and use of intelligent speed adaptation devices.

These Intelligent Transport Systems can make a cheap contribution in the short term to secure compliance with key traffic rules. Following the Swedish example, public authorities could help creating a bigger market for security devices by purchasing cars fitted with compliance enhancing in-car technologies.

Implement the Verona 3 conclusions

The Transport Ministers gathered at the Verona Conference in November 2005 have adopted numerous recommendations to promote life-long learning in the field of road safety. The Presidency could play a role in mobilising the Council to exchange best practices on, among other, better driver training and protection of vulnerable road users.