Labelling of tyres: fuel efficiency

2008/0221(COD) - 13/11/2008 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to lay down provisions to label tyres with respect to fuel efficiency and other essential parameters.

PROPOSED ACT: Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council.

CONTENT: with as much as 23% of total CO_2 emissions coming from road transport, reducing vehicles' energy intensity and emissions is a major challenge for the EU. The Energy Efficiency Action Plan underlined the possibility of achieving the 20% energy saving potential by 2020 by presenting a list of targeted actions including the labelling of tyres.

Tyres can play a significant part in reducing transport energy intensity and emissions since they account for 20% to 30% of vehicles' total fuel consumption. This proportion of fuel is used to overcome rolling resistance (RR) due mainly to "hysteretic loss" (loss of energy through the heating and deformation of the wheels while rolling). New technologies make it possible to reduce RR, so that it currently varies by up to 100% across all tyre categories. For passenger cars, for instance, this means a difference of up to 10% in fuel consumption between the worst- and the best-performing tyre set.

Studies show that fuel efficient tyres are cost-effective: the price differential of better performing tyres will be compensated by savings over their lifetime. There is therefore a direct interest for tyre purchasers to reduce their fuel bill and for society as a whole to reduce emissions due to road transport. The impact at EU level could be impressive; the external study conducted within the impact assessment identified a savings potential of from 0.56 to 1.51 Mtoe per year depending on the speed of market transformation. This is equivalent to removing 0.5 million to 1.3 million passenger cars from EU roads (or 3% to 8% of new passenger cars registered).

In addition, tyre performances are interrelated, so that acting on one parameter, such as energy efficiency, may have an adverse impact on other parameters, such as wet grip, whereas optimising wet grip may have an adverse impact on external rolling noise. A labelling scheme for tyres at EU level aims to respond to the suboptimal market transformation towards fuel efficient tyres arising from lack of information. It would allow consumers to make an informed choice, give incentives to tyre manufacturers to upgrade their products and contribute to awareness-raising. Market surveys have also shown that consumers would be interested in buying fuel-efficient tyres.

The proposal on tyre labelling is part of an integrated approach to reduce fuel consumption and emissions in road transport.

Directed at the demand side, it will complement the type-approval legislation on tyres which addresses the supply side by means of minimum requirements. The minimum requirements governing rolling resistance, wet grip and external rolling noise scheduled to take effect by October 2012 in the proposal for a Regulation on the general safety of motor vehicles will guarantee a standard level of tyre quality, while further improvements above these levels will be driven by the labelling scheme. In a context of increased competition on the tyre market, it will introduce a level playing field for all; with the possibility for producers to benefit from product differentiation so that competition will not only be based on prices but also on product quality. It is also likely to decrease the entry barriers for new entrants based on reputation. The industry will, for its part, receive more return on its R&D investment since consumers and end-users will have access to objective, reliable and comparable information on tyre parameters.

The labelling proposal follows an integrated approach on tyres which will ensure that standardised information is supplied not only on fuel efficiency but also on wet grip and external rolling noise, so that consumers and end-users can make an informed choice. The aim is to promote, through the operation of market forces, dynamic improvement of all parameters beyond the minimum requirements set for type approval (the procedure which grants access to the EU market).

More specifically, this proposal concerns creating a labelling scheme for tyre parameters including fuel efficiency, wet grip and external rolling noise, addressing C1, C2 and C3 tyres (tyres fitted on passenger cars, light- and heavy-duty vehicles). It will provide harmonised and easy-to-understand information to consumers, companies and retailers by grading tyre performance characteristics. It will guarantee that the information is made available to end-users via different media (e.g. electronic, catalogues, stickers).

The proposal is in line with the revised Commission strategy on CO2 from passenger cars and light commercial vehicles and the input from the CARS 21 high-level group. This strategy is based on an integrated approach for achieving the 120g/km CO2 target by 2012.