Road safety: retrofitting of mirrors to existing fleet of heavy goods vehicles

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The Commission presents a report on the implementation of Directive 2007/38/EC ('the Retrofitting Directive') on the retrofitting of mirrors to heavy goods vehicles registered in the Community. The Retrofitting Directive applies to vehicles designed to carry goods and having a maximum mass of between 3.5 and 12 tonnes (category N2) and those having a maximum mass of more than 12 tonnes (category N3), which were registered as from 1 January 2000. In accordance the Directive, these vehicles had to be fitted with class IV and V mirrors by 31 March 2009 at the latest.

Transposition: generally, the transposition of this Directive into national legislation was unproblematic and — except in some cases — was done on time. In one Member State (Denmark), transposition took place well ahead of the deadline, since corresponding national rules were already in place when the Directive was adopted.

Implementation: the report states that there appear to have been **no major problems in implementing the Retrofitting Directive.** However, most Member States had no detailed information on how many vehicles failed their roadworthiness test because they failed to comply with the retrofitting requirements. Technical inspection records show whether a vehicle had mirror problems, but they do not specify whether the mirrors failed to comply with the Retrofitting Directive or had other types of defect.

Effect of retrofitting blind spot mirrors: in 2011 the Commission carried out a study on blind spot accidents in order to compare the situation before and after the Directive was implemented. The study included an assessment of the effectiveness of retrofitting blind spot mirrors in terms of the number of fatalities avoided.

It was estimated that in 2009 there were approximately 3.7 million vehicles to be retrofitted as a result of the Directive. Updating the calculations performed when the Directive was adopted showed that the total number of fatal accidents involving an HGV and vulnerable road users would have been expected to decrease by 21.5% between 2005 and 2009 as a result of the Retrofitting Directive. In reality the actual number of fatalities in this type of accident decreased by 27.5 % over this period. However, **the extent to which this positive trend can be attributed to the Retrofitting Directive remains uncertain**. For one thing, the number of pedal cyclist fatalities had already fallen sharply in 2006, before the Retrofitting Directive was implemented.

It should also be noted that the available data cover a very short period after the implementation of the Retrofitting Directive. The date after which the vehicles concerned would fail a roadworthiness test if they did not comply with the Directive was 31 March 2009. When the implementation study was carried out, however, the CARE database contained no data more recent than the end of 2009. So it is possible that the full effect of the Directive will not be seen until a longer time series of data is available.

The CARE database contains information on the circumstances of accidents but not on the contributing factors. It is thus impossible to precisely identify those accidents in which blind spots may have been a contributing factor.

To sum up, there is a **downward trend in the number of fatal accidents involving vulnerable road users and HGVs**, but it is **not clear** how much of this progress can be attributed to the Retrofitting Directive, or if even better results could be achieved by imposing additional technical requirements.

Conclusions: despite the very positive reduction in the number of vulnerable road users killed in road accidents, there are **still more than 1200 such deaths each year** resulting from accidents involving an HGV. Efforts to prevent these accidents must be pursued and the Commission is committed to working on this issue as one of its priorities for the period 2011-2020. There is no single or simple solution that can bring about a substantial reduction in the number of accidents and fatalities. Action should be taken to **improve both the vehicles and the behaviour of road users.**

The Commission will follow closely any technological developments aimed at preventing blind spot accidents which may be incorporated into new vehicles in the future, once they prove their cost-effectiveness. The replacement of mirrors by monitor and camera systems is amongst the possibilities being discussed for future improvements in the field of vision.

As part of the CARS 21 process, the Commission will discuss with Member States and stakeholders what further action ought to be taken to deal with blind spots.

It will also continue to promote better training and awareness, both for HGV drivers and for vulnerable road users, along with actions aimed at improving infrastructure so that vulnerable road users and HGVs can safely share it.