

Road vehicles: maximum weights and dimensions

2023/0265(COD) - 11/07/2023 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to revise Council Directive 96/53/EC laying down for certain road vehicles circulating within the Community the maximum authorised dimensions in national and international traffic and the maximum authorised weights in international traffic.

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

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: the European Parliament decides in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure and on an equal footing with the Council.

BACKGROUND: Council Directive 96/53/EC (the Weights and Dimensions Directive), sets out the maximum permitted weights and dimensions of heavy-duty vehicles that can circulate on the Union's roads in order to ensure road safety and the smooth functioning of the internal market as well as foster the energy and operational efficiency of transport operations and reducing greenhouse gas emissions from those operations. An evaluation of Directive 96/53/EC concluded that **incentives to improve energy efficiency of road transport operations and reduce GHG emissions were insufficient** and did not reflect the **practical implications of using new zero-emission technologies**, which can be heavier and take more space than combustion engine technologies. The national derogations allowing the circulation of longer and/or heavier vehicles have also resulted in a patchwork of diverging rules, hindering smooth cross-border heavy-duty vehicles (HDV) traffic in the EU and leading to loss of operational and energy efficiency. This mix of EU and national requirements, as well as bilateral arrangements, coupled with legal uncertainties, has also led to ineffective and inconsistent enforcement, especially in cross-border transport. These findings confirmed that there is a need to **remove regulatory and technical barriers** and provide **stronger incentives for the uptake of the zero-emission technologies and energy saving devices** in the heavy-duty vehicles sector.

This legislative proposal is part of the **Greening Freight Package** of proposals covering several modes of transport. Its aim is to advance the decarbonisation of freight transport, promote intermodal transport and complete the single European railway area. In addition to this proposal, it includes:

- the revision of Council Directive 92/106/EEC (the Combined Transport Directive) to encourage the use of intermodal transport;
- this proposed revision of Council Directive 96/53/EC on weights and dimensions;
- the [proposal](#) for a regulation establishing a harmonised framework for GHG emissions from freight and passenger transport services (the CountEmissions EU initiative).

CONTENT: the Commission proposal to revise Council Directive 96/53/EC seeks to **accelerate the uptake of zero-emission heavy-duty vehicles and promote intermodal transport**. In particular, it aims to improve the energy and operational efficiency of road transport operations in the broader context of increased EU environmental and climate ambition by 2030 and EU climate neutrality by 2050 and to ensure the free movement of goods and fair competition on the internal road transport market.

The main objectives of the revision of the directive are to:

- remove regulatory and technical barriers and provide **stronger incentives** for the uptake of the zero-emission technologies and energy saving devices in the HDV sector;

- facilitate intermodal operations;
- clarify the rules on the use of longer and/or heavier HDVs in cross-border operations;
- make enforcement more effective and efficient.

The specific provisions of the proposal aim to:

- update the references to relevant legislation on the type-approval and market surveillance of vehicles and their trailers, and systems, components and separate technical units intended for such vehicles;
- align the definitions of ‘trailer’ and ‘semi-trailer’ and the procedures to measure the maximum authorised dimensions with those of the vehicle type-approval legislation, adding the key definitions of ‘European Modular System’ and ‘vehicle transporter’ and the definition of ‘electronic freight transport information (eFTI) platform’;
- amend the definition of **intermodal transport** operation and necessary references to these kinds of transport to allow lorries, trailers and semitrailers used in intermodal operations to benefit from the same extra weight allowances as for road vehicles that carry containers or swap bodies and are used in containerised intermodal transport;
- provide legal clarity on the circulation of HDVs that exceed the weights and dimensions set in the existing Directive;
- require Member States to simplify and streamline the procedures for the **issuance of national permits** or the adoption of similar arrangements for the transport of indivisible loads in order to minimise the administrative burden for operators and avoid delays;
- introduce the obligation of **cooperation** between Member States with regard to the requirements on vehicle signalling or markings, and prevents disproportionate barriers in the form of national language requirements;
- extend the **geographical scope of trials** aimed at testing, assessing and progressively introducing new technologies and schemes, including EMS, which could be conducted also across borders, strengthens their temporary nature and sets up a maximum period of 5 years for such trials with European Modular Systems. Member States should set up a monitoring system to take advantage at EU level of the lesson learnt from the technology tested in trials as well as ensure the comparability of the information gathered, including the impact of EMS;
- **remove artificial barriers to the cross-border movement of heavier lorries** that prevent road transport from improving its operational, energy and environmental efficiency in the transition to zero-emission operations;
- raise the weight limit for zero-emission vehicles from the current **42 tonnes to 44 tonnes**, regardless of the weight of the actual zero-emission technology. This means that operators will gain additional loading weight and therefore payload capacity if the technology becomes lighter;
- allow extra height for the carriage of **high-cube containers**, thus enabling standard vehicles to involve in this type of intermodal transport;

- clarify that the excess in maximum lengths provided for **elongated cabs** can be such that it can accommodate also zero-emission technologies, such as batteries and hydrogen tanks, in vehicles equipped with elongated cabs.