Road transport: charging of heavy goods vehicles and infrastructures fees

2003/0175(COD) - 23/07/2003 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE : to present a proposal for a Directive amending Directive 1999/62/EC (the "Eurovignette" Directive) on the charging of heavy goods vehicles for the use of certain infrastructures. CONTENT : this proposal aims to improve the framework for national road use fee in the interests of the proper functioning of the single market. The Commission announced its intention of proposing a directive on charging for the use of road infrastructure in the White Paper "European transport policy for 2010: time to decide". The European Parliament confirmed the need for infrastructure charging when it adopted the report on the conclusions of the White Paper on 12 February 2003. The Copenhagen European Council of December 2002 and the Brussels European Council of March 2003 also welcomed the Commission's intention of presenting a new "Eurovignette" Directive. For the purposes of setting tolls, Directive 1999/62/EC takes account of infrastructure construction, operating, maintenance and development costs. To avoid charging for construction costs more than once, the costs that may be taken into account for this purpose must be limited to those for new infrastructure, i.e. infrastructure to be built in future or which has just been completed. However, a special provision should be introduced, so as not to cause prejudice, with regard to taking into account construction costs, to the rights relating to concession contracts in existence at the time of entry into force of the directive. The Commission's proposal provides a framework that will enable Member States, with due regard for the subsidiarity principle, to give economic incentives to transport in the form of a price structure that better reflects the costs to society. It is not so much the level of charges on transport as the structure of the charges and the manner in which they are applied to the various categories of user that need to change. Infrastructure fees offer the possibility of greater differentiation by vehicle type, time and place, and hence of more accurately reflecting costs in different situations without increasing the overall burden of taxes and fees in the road sector. Whereas the existing Community rules apply only to heavy goods vehicles of at least 12 tonnes, the system proposed by the Commission would apply to all lorries exceeding 3.5 tonnes used for goods transport. Such vehicles are widely used for intra-Community goods transport, and must therefore be covered by the toll systems set up for commercial transport. The proposed framework covers the trans-European road network and any other road to which traffic may be diverted from the trans-European road network and which is in direct competition with certain parts of that network. Such traffic diversion has serious consequences in terms of traffic regulation and congestion, not to mention accidents; it was therefore appropriate to include them in the scope of the Community directive. In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, the Member States remain free to apply tolls on roads not covered by the proposal for a directive, provided they comply with the rules and principles laid down in the Treaty. The objectives of the framework proposed by the Commission are as follows: - passing on costs more accurately. The existing legislation links charges only approximately to damage to infrastructure, congestion or accident risks. The proposed directive therefore gives Member States the possibility of varying tolls according to a number of factors: distance travelled; the damage caused to roads according to the type of vehicle; the environmental impact in terms of the EURO emission standards for heavy goods vehicles; the time of day; and the level of congestion on the road concerned; Member States which choose to apply such a system of road charging can offset the introduction of tolls by reducing or eliminating the annual vehicle road tax. - improving the quality of service. The revenue from infrastructure charges should be used for the benefit of the transport sector. In certain cases, there should be scope for cross-financing of infrastructure providing an alternative to road transport. To that end, the Commission's proposal lays down that the revenue from the charging system must be ploughed back into road infrastructure and into the transport sector as a whole, taking due account of the balanced development of the transport networks; - allowing the cross-financing of infrastructure construction in sensitive areas. The proposal for a directive allows the Member States to apply mark-ups to tolls for using roads in particularly sensitive areas, notably mountainous regions. Such mark-ups will be used to cross-finance the investment costs of other transport infrastructures of a high European interest (railways). The

construction of such rail infrastructure is increasingly necessary in view of the density and growth of traffic in such regions. Particular attention must be devoted to particularly sensitive areas, in particular mountain regions such as the Alps or the Pyrenees. In order to ensure that the requirements of the Directive are correctly enforced, Member States must designate an independent infrastructure supervision authority. This body will have a key role in ensuring, through appropriate monitoring, balanced use of the available resources. Simple, clear rules must therefore be established regarding the possibility of promoting synergies between competing transport infrastructure modes in a single corridor.