Pricing in transport: towards a fair and efficient pricing in transport. Green paper

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OBJECTIVE: given the urgent need to reduce road congestion, pollution and accidents, the Commission's Green Paper on road transport pricing seeks to inaugurate a far-reaching debate on how to ensure that external costs are internalized fairly. CONTENT: the Green Paper points out that, in numerous cases, there is a clear discrepancy between prices paid by users and actual costs, as regards both price structures and levels. Some users pay too much and others not enough. This trend needs to be reversed and "true" prices need to be established, because prices can be used to guide investments and user choices. A new policy is urgently needed, especially as congestion costs the EU approximately 2% of GDP, accidents cost 1.5% and air and noise pollution cost at least 0.6% every year, representing a total cost of around ECU 250 billion per annum, 90% of which can be ascribed to road transport. These huge costs are paid for by society as a whole which, in the Commission's view, is unfair and inefficient. The Green Paper contains various methods which could be implemented in the short term at national and Community level in order to introduce fair and efficient pricing. They include: - adapting current Community legislation on road charges paid by heavy goods vehicles, - kilometer charges measured electronically and calculated on the basis of the damage caused to roads and bridges, - tolls in congested or sensitive zones, - differentiated taxes depending on fuel quality, - vehicle taxes modulated on the basis of the noise and pollution caused by the vehicle, - landing taxes (for air transport) and rail user taxes (for rail transport), - providing information on the safety of vehicles and means of transport. The Commission acknowledges that some transport policies are formulated at Community level (e.g. standards, minimum fuel taxes) and others are adopted by Member States (road taxes, tolls etc.), which is why its intention in its Green Paper is to inaugurate a debate which should lead to a consensus on the approach to be taken.