Road infrastructure safety management

2006/0182(COD) - 05/10/2006 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to improve the management of road infrastructure.

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

BACKGROUND: in its efforts to halve the number of road fatalities by 2010, the European Commission is presenting two Directives. The first, the one discussed here, concerns improved road infrastructure management. The second, requires heavy vehicles to be equipped with “blind spot mirrors” in order to reduce the number of accidents. For a summary of the second proposed Directive see COD/2006/0183.

In its 2001 White Paper on European Transport Policy for 2010, the European Commission announced that it would be preparing proposals for improved road infrastructure safety. The European Parliament has also invited the Commission to provide guidelines for high-risk spot management and road safety audits. Infrastructure safety, alongside driver and vehicle safety, acts as a vital third pillar to a comprehensive road safety programme. Much progress has been made in terms of vehicles safety with car occupants running a much lower risk of death or injury in case of an accident than was the case ten years ago. Similarly, test and training requirement have been gradually increased to ensure that European drivers can cope with the dangers of road traffic. The same can not be said for road safety infrastructure.

The purpose of this proposal, therefore, is to ensure that safety is integrated into all phases of planning, design and the operation of the road infrastructure spanning the Trans-European Network (TEN-T). Along with economic and environmental considerations, safety will play a vital component to the preparation of new infrastructure. The proposed Directive will ensure that managers are given the correct guidelines, training and information needed to guarantee safety on the road network.

CONTENT: the proposed Directive explicitly limits the requirements to a minimum. The comprehensive road safety programme centres on four proposed procedures. They are:

- Road safety impact assessments. These will help decision makers make the right choices when deciding on the development of new roads or major changes to the operation of existing roads, particularly so for adjacent networks.

- Road safety audits. These will offer independent control and recommendations for technical verification concerning the design of either new roads or the reworking of existing roads.

- Network safety management. The aim here is to target roads with a high concentration of accidents.

- Safety inspections. These will form a regular part of road maintenance.

According to Commission estimates, around 7000 injuries could be avoided and around 600 lives every year could be saved if the proposed measures to the Trans-European road network are applied.