

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on 'Policy orientations on road safety 2011-2020'

(2011/C 166/06)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- is pleased with the new policy orientations on road safety submitted by the European Commission, and endorses the seven proposed objectives and associated actions; calls on the Commission to clarify exactly what contribution it expects each of the seven individual objectives to make to the overall target of a 50% reduction in road deaths by 2020;
- supports the idea of harmonising the various definitions of a major injury, so that the effectiveness of road safety policy can be better monitored and assessed; feels that, on the basis of a common definition of major and minor injuries, a common objective for reducing the number of major injuries should be developed;
- calls on all Member States to transpose the directive on road infrastructure safety management in full and agrees with the Commission that action should be taken to ensure that the principles set out in that directive are applied to all road infrastructure financed from EU funds, albeit with the proviso that the proportionality principle should always be taken into consideration so that small projects are not burdened with unnecessary red tape or disproportionate technical requirements;
- urges the Commission to develop, within the bounds of its competence, initiatives that foster harmonisation between the Member States with regard to road traffic rules, road signs and road markings. It suggests that the Commission launch public discussions on the subject of this opinion via a green paper.

Rapporteur	Mr Johan SAUWENS (BE/EPP), Mayor of Bilzen
Reference document	Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Towards a European road safety area: policy orientations on road safety 2011-2020 COM(2010) 389 final

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

1. Road safety will play an important role in the European Commission's forthcoming White Paper on transport policy 2010-2020. The European road safety policy orientations up to 2020 aim to provide a general governance framework and challenging objectives which should guide national and local strategies.

2. In the process of drafting this opinion, consultations were held with the partners in the Subsidiarity Monitoring Network (SMN), starting on 25 October and concluding on 10 December 2010.

The proposed action plan and introductory remarks

— Road safety and local/regional authorities

3. Road safety is a major issue for society. Each year, more than 30 000 people are killed, and an estimated 1 500 000 injured, on the European Union's roads, costing society approximately EUR 130 billion, quite apart from the terrible human suffering involved.

4. The majority of road accidents occur on urban and rural roads, with only 5% taking place on motorways. In most Member States, responsibility for maintaining much of the road network lies with local and regional authorities which are also, in many cases, responsible for enforcing road traffic rules, via the local or regional police. Moreover, local and regional authorities are also often responsible for organising public transport, for local traffic regulations, for running prevention campaigns and for providing emergency assistance at accidents.

5. It therefore makes sense for local and regional authorities to be involved in, and to make a contribution to, initiatives established at national and European level, but also for them to develop, if they consider it appropriate, their own road safety strategies that focus on resolving local problems and are tailored to local circumstances.

6. The Commission acknowledges the role of local and regional authorities in developing and implementing road safety policy and notes that, in line with the principle of subsidiarity, the actions described should be implemented at the

most appropriate level and through the most appropriate means. The communication quite rightly emphasises the need for an integrated approach: 'Road safety has close links with policies on energy, environment, employment, education, youth, public health, research, innovation and technology, justice, insurance, trade and foreign affairs, among others'.

— European Commission target

7. According to the Commission's figures, there were 54 302 deaths on the European Union's roads in 2001. The objective of the previous road safety action programme was to reduce this by 50% to no more than 27 000 deaths in 2010. In 2009, 34 500 road deaths were reported in the European Union, a 36% reduction, and the Commission expects that, in 2010, a total reduction of 41% compared to 2001 will be achieved. Although the objective has thus not quite been reached, this can be seen as a satisfactory outcome.

8. For 2010-2020, the Commission's aim is once again to halve the total number of road deaths in the European Union. Given the reduction already achieved over the past decade and the desire to further improve road safety in the European Union, this objective can be regarded as reasonable, but ambitious.

— Strategic objectives

9. The Commission sets out seven strategic objectives:

- a) Improve education and training of road users
- b) Increase enforcement of road rules
- c) Safer road infrastructure
- d) Safer vehicles
- e) Promote the use of modern technology to increase road safety

f) Improve emergency and post-injuries services

g) Protect vulnerable road users.

10. We can support these objectives as they stand. In their current form, the proposed policy orientations give no cause for concern regarding compliance with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, as the objectives of the proposed actions cannot be achieved by the Member States alone. Their scope means that they can be better achieved at European level, because specific European legislation, cross-border actions and cooperation at EU level can ensure that policy is consistent and effective at national, regional and local level. The proposed actions also provide clear added value over actions implemented purely at national, regional or local level. Finally, the proposed form of action is the simplest way of achieving the objectives set, and provides as much scope as possible for national decision-making.

11. However, given that local and regional authorities play an important part in developing and implementing road safety policy, it would be helpful for the Commission to provide figures clarifying exactly what contribution it expects each of the seven individual objectives to make to the proposed overall reduction of 50%. This could shed some light on what efforts may be expected from local and regional authorities.

— Implementation of the European policy orientations on road safety 2011-2020

12. The Commission sets out two principles for the implementation of its policy orientations:

- improving the commitment of all parties concerned through stronger governance;
- creating and developing common tools for monitoring and evaluating the efficiency of road safety policies.

13. The CoR notes that the Commission is aiming to improve monitoring through data collection and analysis, and endorses this approach. We would note in this connection that the current data collection system (CARE database) only uses aggregated data at Member State level: it has no regional dimension, although this information is, in principle, freely available within the Member States. It would be particularly beneficial for the European regions to be able to compare their performance against that of nearby or comparable regions in other countries, just as the Member States can currently compare themselves against each other. The inclusion and availability of such information in the CARE database could therefore bring significant added value and also act as an incentive for local and regional authorities.

— Harmonisation of road traffic rules, road signs, markings and guidelines for infrastructure design

14. The CoR notes that there are significant practical differences between the Member States in terms of the standards they use for road traffic rules, road signs, markings and guidelines for infrastructure design. At the same time, cross-border traffic between Member States – both freight traffic and business-related and recreational passenger traffic – continues to increase year on year. The CoR believes that both road safety and freedom of movement within the EU would be improved if the roads in the various Member States were designed and equipped as far as possible according to the same principles and rules, so that the appearance of the road is clear and recognisable to all road users, even when they cross borders between Member States. Any measures should be based on best practice and scope allowed for adapting solutions to the local situation.

Policy recommendations

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

15. stresses that the issue of road safety is extremely **important**, and endorses the principles that the Commission has used to draw up policy orientations for 2011-2020:

- striving for the highest road safety standards throughout Europe;
- promoting an integrated approach to road safety;
- shared responsibility in line with the subsidiarity and proportionality principles;

16. welcomes the positive results achieved by the previous road safety action programme, as revealed in the ex-post evaluation, but notes that, at more than **30 000 road fatalities a year**, the death toll on the European Union's roads remains **unacceptably high**;

17. notes that the Commission is proposing a **50% reduction in the number of road fatalities** for 2011-2020, and considers such an objective to be reasonable but ambitious, given that an average reduction of 36% was achieved in the Member States over the previous period 2001-2009;

18. is pleased with the new policy orientations on road safety submitted by the European Commission, and **endorses the seven proposed objectives** and associated actions;

19. calls on the Commission to clarify exactly **what contribution it expects each of the seven individual objectives to make** to the overall target of a 50% reduction in road deaths by 2020;

20. supports the idea of **harmonising the various definitions of a major injury**, so that the effectiveness of road safety policy can be better monitored and assessed;

21. feels that, on the basis of a common definition of major and minor injuries, a common **objective for reducing the number of major injuries** should be developed, along similar lines to the objective for reducing the number of deaths;

22. highlights the importance of reaching agreement on the **directive facilitating cross-border enforcement in the field of road safety**. Traffic fines and other penalties lose their deterrent effect if they cannot be collected across the EU's internal borders, which also leads to discriminatory treatment because whether or not a traffic offence is punished depends on the nationality of the offender;

23. also calls on all Member States to transpose the **directive on road infrastructure safety management** in full and agrees with the Commission that action should be taken to ensure that the principles set out in that directive are applied to all road infrastructure financed from EU funds, albeit with the proviso that the proportionality principle should always be taken into consideration so that small projects are not burdened with unnecessary red tape or disproportionate technical requirements;

24. thinks that, more generally, and in line with the principles of **subsidiarity and multilevel governance**, local and regional authorities must, first of all, draw up their own road safety policies within their remit and, secondly, participate in the mechanisms established at European or national level for running road safety initiatives;

25. believes that the aim must be for the objectives set out in the strategic policy orientations 2011-2020 to be **integrated in all transport-related policy plans and relevant transport projects** at EU, Member State, regional and local levels;

26. would ask the Commission and the Member States to take steps to improve the **gathering and analysis of accident data**. It is vital to gain a better understanding of road accidents in order to make improvements in terms of developing policy and assessing progress, not least at local and regional level. Member States' methods of gathering and reporting data

should be harmonised further, as recommended in the EU research project SafetyNet;

27. recommends that the Commission and the Member States should supplement the existing system whereby **accidents are recorded** by the police with information on the severity of victims' injuries, which is available from **emergency services and hospitals**;

28. urges the Commission to make more **regional- and local-level information** available, *inter alia* via the CARE database, so that local and regional authorities can compare themselves against comparable regions in other countries;

29. notes that, in many countries, road accidents are the main cause of **work-related injuries**, and suggests that the Commission's action plan could call on **employers** in the public and private sectors to develop policies promoting safe travel as part of an integrated safety culture. Issues of road safety should also be given a higher priority in public and private employers' new and existing company transport plans;

30. highlights the importance of integrating **road safety education** into the required curriculum throughout the period of compulsory schooling in all Member States;

31. urges the Commission to continue to pay attention, via the **research** framework programmes, to academic research into road safety at a European scale, particularly in the following areas:

- the potential benefits to road safety of internalising the costs of accidents;
- impact monitoring of measures in the fields of education, infrastructure, vehicle technology and traffic management;
- the scale of under-reporting of traffic accidents, and strategies to improve reporting;
- research into factors explaining the causes of and the severity of the injuries arising from certain accidents;

32. urges the Commission to develop, within the bounds of its competence, initiatives that foster **harmonisation** between the Member States with regard to **road traffic rules, road signs and road markings**. It suggests that the Commission launch public discussions on the subject of this opinion via a green paper;

33. calls on the Commission to take steps, through existing and forthcoming research programmes, to develop recommendations and codes of good practice for the design and construction of inherently safe road infrastructure that could contribute to better and more harmonised practice in the **design of road infrastructure** in the various Member States. These recommendations could, for example, relate to the design of roundabouts, urban approach roads, rural roads outside built-up areas, cycle paths and pedestrian crossings;

34. urges the Commission to use an appropriate internal mechanism to monitor the implementation of the road safety programme. It may be appropriate to establish a **road safety**

agency or to strengthen existing bodies such as the **European Road Safety Observatory**;

Commitment

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

35. draws attention to the European Road Safety Charter (www.erscharter.eu), which was developed by the Commission and calls on Europe's local and regional authorities to sign the charter on an individual basis and to make practical commitments to improving road safety within their own areas.

Brussels, 31 March 2011.

*The President
of the Committee of the Regions*
Mercedes BRESSO
