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**EUROPEAN CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS OF TRANSPORT
COUNCIL OF MINISTERS**

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Council of Ministers

ROAD TRANSPORT

SAFETY ON RURAL ROADS IN EUROPE

Recommendations

This document was submitted under item 4 "Road Transport" of the Draft Agenda of the Bucharest session of the Council of Ministers and adopted.

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Although still far from satisfactory, more progress has been made on road safety on motorways and urban roads over the past 20 years than on country roads.

Rural roads are defined as roads outside urban areas that are not motorways or unpaved roads.

A report published by the OECD in 1999¹ recommends that every country addresses the problem and develop a safety strategy specifically for the rural road network.

While this issue has not yet been addressed within the ECMT framework, it is undeniably a very important one for Member countries as a whole, especially as the rural road network is by far the most extensive network in any country, whatever its specific circumstances, in terms of both kilometres covered and traffic.

Background

The rural road safety problem is a very serious one that has received less attention in comparison with other networks, such as motorways and urban roads.

However, it is quite clear from all of the indicators (raw data on accidents and casualties, risk exposure and trends over time) that it is time to address this issue. The fact is that 60 per cent of road deaths are on rural roads.

There is a lack of safety policies and targets specifically for rural roads in most countries. Rural road safety deserves a higher priority.

In some countries the proportion of deaths on rural roads is relatively low, thus indicating an urgent problem on urban roads. It is in towns where most progress in reducing casualties can be made but this should not be undertaken at the expense of rural road safety. Strategies for both urban and rural roads are needed.

Given the types of accident identified as occurring on rural roads (80 per cent involve single vehicles coming off the road, head-on collisions, or collisions at an intersection) the key factors influencing policy choice -- from the usual range of infrastructure, vehicle and road user policies -- will in this case be infrastructure and road-user behaviour, since inappropriate and excessive speeds, alcohol and non wearing of seatbelts are major contributing factors in accidents and accident severity.

Developing a strategic approach to road safety

Developing and implementing a policy strategy specifically targeting rural roads is an integral part of a comprehensive road safety policy and is completely in keeping with the approach currently being taken by the ECMT.

¹ Safety strategies for rural roads, OECD/RTR 1999.

The key components of this kind of strategic comprehensive approach are as follows.

- A strong political **commitment** based on an increased **acceptance** of road safety as a problem.
- The development of a safety culture in society which clearly recognises that road safety is the responsibility of each of us individually.
- **Co-ordination** between all of the actors involved, at whatever level.
- The setting of road death and injury reduction **targets**.
- The development and implementation of a **road safety plan**. To this end, it should be noted that ECMT report [CEMT/CM(2002)17] has identified inexpensive measures that have proven to be very effective and that every country should adapt them for inclusion in their own programmes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Council of Ministers meeting in Bucharest on 29 and 30 May 2002

NOTING

- the 1999 report drafted under the Road Transport and Intermodal Linkages Research Programme of the OECD and its conclusions, and
- the report on “Strategies to improve safety on rural roads”[CEMT/CM(2002)17];
- that there are large differences between the best countries and the rest. Policies therefore need to be developed to help reduce the differences between countries and encourage the best to do better;

RECOMMENDS that the Governments of ECMT Member countries, as far as safety on rural roads is concerned and in the context of development and implementation of a road safety plan,

- Develop suitable **institutional structures** to enable all the actors concerned, from both public and private sectors, to work with each other. These include highway authorities, local authorities, police authorities, education and health services as well as private sector firms, insurance companies and associations.
- Ensure that all participants are motivated, well trained and have the knowledge and resources they need to fulfil their duties.
- Improve the **gathering and processing of accident data** so that, on a comparable basis, the causes and impact of accidents can be accurately identified and adequate measures taken and subsequently evaluated, particularly from the standpoint of cost-effectiveness.

- In view of the very uneven road safety results from one Member country to another, further familiarise themselves with the different elements of successful policies (“best practice”, benchmarking), evaluate them and adapt them to their domestic circumstances, and to that end:
- Ensure the **transfer of knowledge**, at both the institutional and practical levels and between countries and individuals alike.

RECOMMENDS, as specific actions,

As regards user behaviour

Taking the necessary measures to ensure, first of all, that users adjust their speed to the characteristics of the road network on which they are travelling. This is especially important in bad weather and in the presence of vulnerable road users. This will require raising user awareness, which can be done through education at any age, by targeted information and awareness campaigns, and by using regular spot-checks as a deterrent.

Ensuring that safety belts are actually worn in both the front and rear seats of passenger cars and in other vehicles where they are fitted, on all roads, whether urban or rural. Because of the higher speeds on rural roads, seat belts and child restraints are particularly important. Child restraints should therefore deserve the same attention. More checks are needed and penalties for non-compliance applied.

Stepping up prevention and checks for drink driving.

In the same vein, actively considering, evaluating or imposing penalties for driving under the influence of medication, drugs or in a state of fatigue.

As regards infrastructure

Improving road safety by improving road layout to assist drivers at bends and junctions. Along lengths of road measures should include those to reduce head-on collisions. This can be achieved by consistency of design including those road markings and signs, improved road surfaces and removing or protecting roadside obstructions.

As part of an integrated policy, establishing a road hierarchy, taking categories of traffic (through-traffic, distribution, access) and categories of road users (pedestrians, cyclists) into account.

Ensuring continuity of maintenance of the road network, paying particular attention to the inspections and audit of safety standards, and elimination of black spots. Many cost-effective measures can be integrated into routine maintenance programmes.

As regards vehicles and telematics

In view of accidents occurring on rural roads due to excess speed,

- Studying the feasibility of extending the EU maximum 90 km/h speed limiters to lorries and maximum 100 km/h speed limiters to buses and coaches to all ECMT countries.
- Encouraging the introduction of voluntary speed limiting devices for passenger cars².
- Studying the feasibility of providing relevant, timely and accurate information to drivers on approach to bends and junctions through, for instance, the use of vehicle activated speed sensitive signs.
- Considering the introduction of fully automated vehicle speed control that adapts to the speed limit or specific road conditions (Intelligent Speed Adaptation). Before this can be implemented more work needs to be done on driver acceptability, and to agree common standards and legislation. To this end, the work undertaken within the EU should be taken into account.

In view of the need for the fastest possible response by the emergency services, putting in place warning systems and ensuring the continuity of information flow and processing to the emergency services; in this respect, the adoption of a uniform emergency number (112) by all ECMT Member countries would be a substantial improvement.

Monitoring the development of automated traffic information and management systems so that they can be extended if necessary to those roads with the highest accident rates on this type of network.

Actively encouraging and promoting rapid assimilation of currently available improvements in vehicle safety (including rear seat belts, air bags, ABS, child restraints) into their vehicle fleets.

INSTRUCTS the Committee of Deputies to disseminate these recommendations to the people and bodies concerned, and to monitor their implementation and report back to it in due time on their implementation.

2. Germany assumes that the voluntary character of this measure applies to the fitting as well as the use of such devices, which function as conventional speed control or cruise control devices. Germany is not convinced of the benefits and the causal relation between the reduction of accidents and the use of speed control devices as maintained in the recommendations.