European Transport Safety Council

BRIEFING | Road Safety Priorities for the EU in 2021

Memorandum to the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

July 2021

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Introduction

Slovenia has taken over the EU Presidency on 1st July 2021 as the EU continues to grapple with the Covid-19 crisis, which has brought additional challenges for transport and mobility policies.

18,844 people lost their lives in road traffic in the EU in 2020, 10,847 fewer than in 2010, representing a 37% decrease. There were 56,305 fewer deaths on EU roads than there would have been if deaths had continued at the same level as in 2010. ETSC estimates the monetary value to society of human losses avoided by preventing these road deaths at approximately €156 billion.

The EU, and its Member States, agreed a target to cut road deaths by half in the decade to 2020. Over the target period 2010-2020, the largest annual reduction in the number of road deaths in the EU was achieved in 2020: 3,919 deaths were prevented in the EU in 2020 compared to 2019, an unprecedented 17% decrease in just one year. By comparison, road deaths in the EU declined by just 3% between 2018 and 2019 and by just 6% over the period 2013-2019 (Fig.1).1 Yet, the exceptional 2020 results were not an extraordinary outcome of dramatic shifts in road safety policy, but rather a consequence of the unprecedented lockdowns related to the Covid-19 pandemic. A special PIN report published in July 2020 revealed a drop of close to 40% in the number of road deaths in the EU in just the month of April 2020, by which time most European countries were in the first lockdown, compared to the month of April in the previous three years.2 Unprecedented restrictions on travel and movement had a significant impact on traffic levels and led to a subsequent decrease in road deaths and serious injuries.

[1] ETSC (2020), PIN Briefing, The Impact of Covid-19 Lockdowns on Road Deaths in April 2020, www.etsc.eu/PINCovid19

[2] EU23: EU27 excluding IT, FI and IE due to inconsistent data trend and LT due to lack of data.

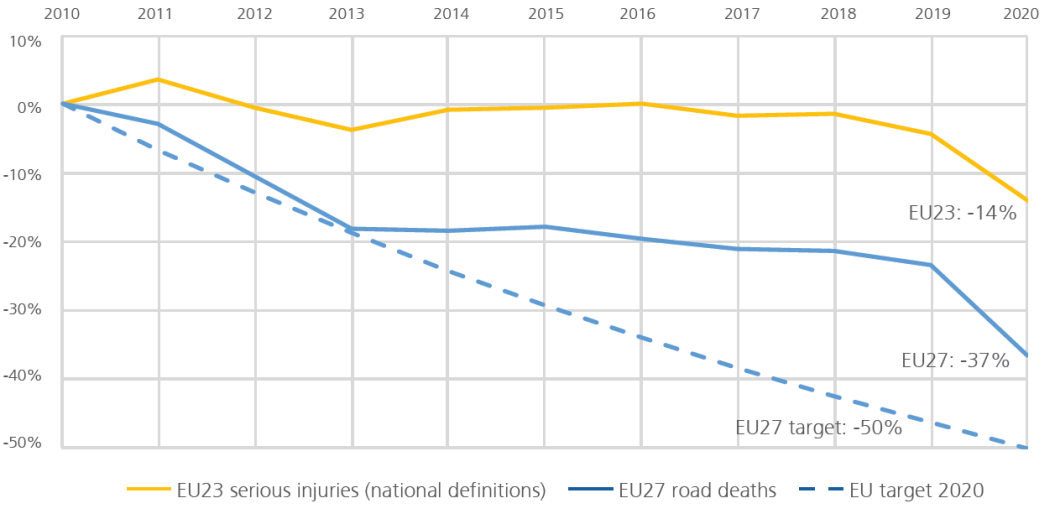

Figure 1. Reduction in the number of road deaths in the EU27 since 2010 plotted against the EU target for 2020 and reduction in the number of serious road traffic injuries in the EU23 based on countries' national definitions. EU23: EU27 excluding IT, FI and IE due to nconsistent data trend and LT due to lack of data. EU23 reduction in serious road traffic injuries is an ETSC estimate as serious injury data for 2020 were not available for some countries at the time this report went to print.

[13] EU23: EU27 excluding IT, FI and IE due to inconsistent trend data and LT due to lack of data.

Figure 1. Reduction in the number of road deaths in the EU27 since 2010 (blue line) plotted against the EU target for 2020 (blue dotted line).

The weekly number of road deaths in the EU is equivalent to two typical passenger airliners crashing and killing everyone on board.

In addition, around 120,000 people were seriously injured on EU27 roads in 2019 according to European Commission estimates, based on the MAIS3+ standard definition of a serious injury.3

In this briefing, ETSC outlines its recommendations on the key EU road safety policy dossiers to be steered by the Slovenian Presidency of the European Union in the second half of 2021.

The EC is currently preparing the revision of the Trans-European-Transport (TEN-T) Network. The last time this legislation was updated was in 2013. Since then, the Road Infrastructure Safety Management (RISM) Directive has been revised. Consequently, the most important priority for the new TEN-T Regulation is to take into account the latest changes included in the revision of the RISM Directive, which applies to the TEN-T network.

The EC is also preparing the revision of the urban mobility package, also presented in 2013. This package also has the potential to improve road safety.

3 European Commission Press release (11 June 2020), Road safety: Europe's roads are getting safer but progress remains too slow https://bit.ly/38CDjfT

Moreover, two other important pieces of road safety related legislation are under revision: the Driving Licence Directive 2006/126 and the Cross Border Enforcement Directive 2015/413. The preparations from the side of the Presidency will most likely only start to feature on the agenda at the end of 2021.

Slovenia takes the helm of the EU Presidency as Europe attempts to exit from one of the biggest challenges it has ever faced: Covid-19. It's a once-in-a-lifetime crisis that presents great threats, but also great opportunities for road safety.

On the one hand, there have been many reports of excessive speed during lockdown, this is clearly a challenge that must be dealt with to avoid a new normal of speeding with impunity. On the other hand, ETSC has seen incredible examples of cities and towns across the continent responding to the new demand for safe cycling and walking. ETSC, has been making the case for many years that cities need to be redesigned to promote the safest and most sustainable forms of transport – keeping vulnerable road users separate from cars, vans and lorries. The transition out of lockdown could lead to a transport safety revolution, or a return to business as usual. The Slovenian Presidency can also play its part now in making sure that road safety finds its place high on the list of priorities within the Exit Strategy and Recovery Plan.

Key Priorities for the Slovenian Presidency

Road Safety as a Priority within the Urban Mobility Package

One priority area for the near future is urban mobility, as the EC will be adopting a new Urban Mobility package including actions on road safety. According to ETSC, 38% of road deaths occur on urban roads and 70% of these are pedestrians, cyclists and powered two wheelers. The EC stated recently in the new Mobility Strategy that: 'Cities and towns can facilitate safe active mobility and creation of recreational spaces allowing physical activity, parks and green zones through inclusive urban planning and design.'[4]

Also under the new EC's Mobility Strategy there are new actions mentioned under sustainable urban mobility urging all medium and large cities to have a Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) by 2030, with an end goal of zero deaths. The plan also introduced the aim of doubling safe bike lanes from 2300km to 5000km in the EU. The Commission says funding from the TEN-T budget will be made available for safer walking and cycling infrastructure. ETSC would support this goal but also recommends the inclusion of the more far-reaching EuroVelo network into the TEN-T.

ETSC has been monitoring with interest efforts by local authorities across Europe to rapidly improve the safety of vulnerable road users in the past year during the Covid-19 crisis. Cities including Athens, Paris, Berlin, Milan, Madrid, Budapest and Brussels have boldly introduced new or expanded pedestrian and cycling infrastructure with unprecedented haste. More appropriate speed limits are also being introduced in several cases.

ETSC supports this reprioritisation of transport infrastructure in dense, urban areas away from individual motorised transport towards public transport and sustainable, safer and healthier modes such as walking and cycling and that these changes should last into the long-term.[5] ETSC welcomes the EC's intended support for such measures in the new Mobility Strategy. Especially if

[4] European Commission (2020) Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy, Staff Working Document https://bit.ly/3bxcpbe

[5] ETSC PIN Flash 38, How Safe is Walking and Cycling in Europe (2020) https://bit.ly/2LJDpJu
ETSC PIN Flash 37 Safer Roads Safer Cities How to Improve Urban Road Safety in the EU https://bit.ly/3q6oXu2

it's successfully combined with specific funding to support the introduction of new infrastructure for both cyclists and pedestrians as foreseen under the EU's Green Deal funding package and in the upcoming Urban Mobility Package.

A recent report of the European Court of Auditors, which evaluated the use of EU funds in the area of urban mobility, found that, to date, the hope for a 'step change' to improve sustainable urban mobility has not taken place.[6] The report calls on the EC to publish better data on urban mobility, encourage more uptake of SUMPs and link access of funds to SUMPs. These recommendations echo ETSC's recommendations from its recently published PIN Reports on Urban Mobility (2019) and Pedestrian and Cyclist safety (2020).[7]

Moreover, the EC's Mobility Strategy announced that the EC will develop Guidance on Safe Use of Micromobility Devices. As noted by the EC, 'these new personal mobility devices, in particular shared e-scooters, which were deployed in large numbers in cities all over Europe, also raise a number of safety concerns – some related to the safety of the devices themselves (e.g. their centre of gravity, brakes, lights)'.[8] The Guidance could cover where they can be used (e.g. roads, bike lanes, pavements, pedestrian areas, 30 kph areas), at what speed, after which training, as of what age and in compliance with which safety rules (e.g. protective equipment, lights, turn signals, etc.).[9] ETSC would furthermore call for minimum vehicle safety requirements for micromobility devices similar to those of pedal cycles.

The Slovenian Presidency should support the measures proposed to improve urban road safety within the context of the upcoming new Urban Mobility Package in preparation by the EC.

TEN-T Guidelines Regulation Review

ETSC welcomes the upcoming revision of the TEN-T Regulation as an opportunity to further improve road safety. The last time it was revised was in 2013, bringing in changes introduced by the original Infrastructure Safety Directive 2008/96. The Road Infrastructure Safety Directive

[6] European Court of Auditors (2020) Special Report Sustainable Urban Mobility in the EU: No substantial improvement is possible without Member States' commitment https://bit.ly/3oEtrHV

[7] ETSC PIN Flash 38, How Safe is Walking and Cycling in Europe (2020) https://bit.ly/2LJDpJu
ETSC PIN Flash 37 Safer Roads Safer Cities How to Improve Urban Road Safety in the EU https://bit.ly/3q6oXu2

[8] European Commission Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy, Staff Working Document https://bit.ly/38z87xY

[9] ibid

2019/1936 has recently been revised with further new requirements applying to the TEN-T road network, all motorways and all primary roads.

For this upcoming revision of the TEN-T Regulation ETSC has prioritised three key areas for improvement:

TEN-T infrastructure needs to comply with minimum safety design standards in line with new requirements of the RISM Directive including classification categories of safety for each road type set under Article 5. This should cover standards for building new TEN-T network sections, maintaining existing sections and 'urban nodes' road infrastructure. One addition is that EU Member States will introduce a new network wide assessment approach and set up at least three categories of safety by 2024. The TEN-T network should be compliant with the higher levels of safety set in these categories.[10]

Improving the protection of vulnerable road users in line with the new requirements of the Directive which requires that their needs are taken into account in the implementation of all the procedures. ETSC also welcomes the upcoming guidance being developed in the framework of the Directive on quality requirements regarding vulnerable road user safety due for development in 2022. Vulnerable road users also need protection in the 'urban nodes' governed by the TEN-T Regulation. ETSC welcomes the intention of the EC expressed in the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy to require the introduction of SUMPs with road safety targets and measures in all 'urban nodes' conglomerations[11]. ETSC would also welcome the use of EU funds for urban mobility to support increasing the safety of pedestrians and cyclist infrastructure and thus encouraging greater physical activity benefiting health and the environment. ETSC supports the call for the inclusion of the EuroVelo cycle network as part of the TEN-T and the use of EU funds for its continued realisation.

Further prepare the TEN-T road network for automation and new in-vehicle safety technologies. ETSC would recommend starting with preparing certified sections of roads which meet minimum performance standards for automated and semi-automated vehicles. They will need to comply with infrastructure performance covering visibility, state of repair of traffic signs, signals and road markings. Road surface quality and grip requirements should also be added. A fail-safe/fault tolerant design is required to guarantee that automated vehicles operate in a safe state in any event or under adverse conditions. Some elements may be covered by upcoming

[10]ETSC Briefing EU Strategic Action Plan on Road Safety (2019) https://bit.ly/3xG1DaK

[11] European Commission Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy, Staff Working Document https://bit.ly/38z87xY

'common specifications' on road markings and road signs due for adoption in 2022 under the new Infrastructure Safety Directive.

Vehicle safety

The EU has the exclusive competence to set minimum safety standards for all new vehicles sold on the EU market. These standards were updated in 2019.[12] They represent the most direct and effective measures the EU has to further reduce road deaths and injuries. TRL, the UK transport research laboratory, estimated in a study for the European Commission that the package of proposed vehicle safety measures could prevent around 25,000 deaths and 140,000 people seriously injured across all vehicle categories within 15 years.[13]

Following the adoption of the 2019 General Safety Regulation, discussions on the detailed technical standards for each technology and safety measure are ongoing. In order to deliver on the estimated number of deaths and seriously injured to be prevented, strong secondary legislation is needed.

The Slovenian Presidency should support the highest level of standards for the specifications that remain to be delivered, in particular Direct Vision for trucks and Event Data Recorders, given their critical and long-lasting importance for improving road safety in Europe.

Assisted and Automated Driving

The new EC Mobility Strategy for 2021 proposes to set up the revised legal framework for the approval of automated vehicles in the EU and to adopt implementing legislation for connected and automated vehicles. ETSC has long called for the setting up of a robust, harmonised regulatory framework for automated driving at EU level and such a framework is an essential precursor to automated vehicle technology becoming available on the market. A risk assessment is needed to understand the transition to connected and automated vehicles.

A serious concern, especially during the introduction and transitional stage, is looking at how these vehicles will interact with vulnerable road users. Interaction between current vehicle drivers and VRUs sometimes takes the form of communication through eye contact. Vehicles and their sensors and cameras will have to go above and beyond simple detection and be able to pick up

[12] Regulation (EU) 2019/2144 https://bit.ly/3nxMpil

[13] See page 13 of TRL on behalf of the European Commission (2018), Cost-effectiveness analysis of policy options for the mandatory implementation of different sets of vehicle safety measures - Review of the General Safety and Pedestrian Safety Regulations https://bit.ly/39sMkHo

on different forms of communication. High risk scenarios should be identified and ways found to manage all these different possibilities. This is another area that should be a priority for research and testing.

Although the EC indicates that the new GSR provides a "clear legal framework" for the type-approval of automated vehicles, detailed and robust technical standards are not yet adopted.

The framework will furthermore only apply as of 2022, and until then guidelines on the use of the type-approval exemption procedure will be used instead. ETSC already expressed safety concerns regarding the lack of transparency of the existing exemption procedure[14], and furthermore considers the new guidelines insufficient to guarantee safety and transparency.

ETSC calls on the EC to place the role of the driver as well as interaction between the driver and the automated driving system as central when preparing technical requirements. These are missing or taken for granted in the recent regulatory developments. These detailed type approval standards should ensure that automated vehicles will pass a comprehensive test equivalent to a 'driving test', including verifying that it complies with all specific obligations and considerations of the traffic law in all EU Member States.

In this regard, ETSC calls on the Slovenian Presidency to reflect on the possibilities for ensuring the safety of automated driving presented by the possible EU Agency mentioned in the new EC Mobility Strategy, and urges that the type approval and market surveillance of automated vehicles should be one of the agency's key tasks. An Agency could also collect data about collisions, incidents and near misses with (semi) automated vehicles and publish the data.

Meanwhile, with regards to advanced driver assistance systems, the current rules for hands-on lane keeping assistance systems should be revised, as human factor problems such as driver overestimation and misunderstanding have been identified.[15] The Slovenian Presidency should ensure that hands-off lane-keeping assistance systems are not permitted due to concerns regarding their risks for road safety.[16]

[14] ETSC (2018) Letter: Improving the Transparency of the Exemption Procedure for the Type Approval of New Vehicle Technologies http://bit.ly/2HzUEIy

[15] Dutch Safety Board (2019), Who is in control? Road safety and automation in road traffic. http://bit.ly/2LESsV2

[16] For more information, see the second half of the following news article: ETSC (2020), Euro NCAP launches ratings for advanced driver assistance systems. http://bit.ly/3i3Xlmo

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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The European Transport Safety Council (ETSC) is a Brussels-based, independent non-profit making organisation dedicated to reducing the numbers of deaths and injuries in transport in Europe.