Charging of heavy goods vehicles for the use of certain infrastructures

2017/0114(COD) - 31/05/2017 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to improve the application of the "polluter pays" and "user pays" principles to promote sustainable road transport.

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

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: the European Parliament shall decide in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure and on an equal footing with the Council.

BACKGROUND: this initiative is part of the Commission's efforts to create an energy union and from a series of proposals on low-emission transport. It is a follow-up to the Communication "A European strategy for low-emission mobility".

CO2 emissions from road transport in 2014 were still 17% higher than in 1990. The highest share of these emissions originates from passenger cars (over 60%). Under current trends, the emission reduction will not be sufficient to achieve the EU goals set for 2030 and 2050. Moreover, road infrastructure is degrading in many Member States.

Road pricing can be a key incentive for cleaner and more efficient transport operations. Progress towards the Commission's objective of applying the "polluter pays" and "user pays" principles has been slow. There are still inconsistencies in the application of road pricing across the EU.

Directive 1999/62/EC provides the legal framework for charging heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) for the use of certain roads. So far, however, the Directive does not contain elements specifically contributing to the reduction of CO2 emissions from transport. Moreover, it only applies to HGVs, all other vehicles are left unaddressed.

It is for this reason that the Commission proposed to include buses, passenger cars and vans in the scope of the Directive, thereby ensuring more consistent pricing of infrastructure use across the road transport sector.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT: the preferred option provides for the variation of charges for light vehicles according to their CO2 and pollutant emissions, as the preferred option, possibly complemented with the requirement of external cost charging on at least part of the network for HDVs and the phasing-out of time-based charging for light vehicles over a sufficiently long period.

CONTENT: the proposal aims at addressing the shortcomings of existing legislation (Directive 1999/62/EC), i.e. at a better fulfilment of the legislation's objectives.

Scope: it is proposed to extend the scope of the application of the Directive to include light duty vehicles such as minibuses, passenger cars, vans and coaches.

Tolls and user charges: provisions on non-discrimination, proportionality of charges and on the collection and payment of tolls and user charges shall not only apply to networks mainly used by international traffic (the trans-European road network and motorways) but to other roads. Given that distance-based pricing (tolls) rather than duration (tags) better reflects actual use, emission levels and pollution, the Commission proposes to phasing out tariff systems based on (2023 for heavy-duty vehicles, 2027 for other categories of vehicles). The possibility of exempting heavy goods vehicles weighing less than 12 tonnes from road charging would be abolished and the scope of any tariff system would be extended to coaches / buses.

External cost charging: it is proposed that the maximum weighted average external-cost charges should be replaced by readily applicable reference values updated in light of inflation, the scientific progress made in estimating the external costs of road transport and the evolution of the fleet composition. From 1 January 2021, Member States that levy tolls shall apply an external-cost charge to heavy duty vehicles on at least the part of the network where environmental damage generated by heavy duty vehicles is the most important.

Congestion charging: the proposal allows the application of congestion charges on top of the infrastructure charge. Any such congestion charge has to be applied to all vehicle categories in a proportionate and even-handed manner.

Revenues from congestion charges should be used to address congestion problems, for example by supporting alternative transport solutions or removing bottlenecks.

Moreover, the possibility of applying mark-ups would be extended and would no longer be restricted to mountainous regions alone.

Variation of charges: as regards heavy duty vehicles, it is proposed to phase out the variation of charges according to the Euro emission class of the vehicle. Modalities for the variation of tolls and user charges according to the environmental performance of passenger cars, minibuses and vans have been specified. The variation shall be based on emissions of both CO2 and air pollutants, as specified in Annex VII. This provision should incentivise the use of cleaner and more efficient vehicles.

Notifications: it is proposed to simplify the prior information of the Commission in respect of intended external cost charging, by confining the information to basic elements.

DELEGATED ACTS: the proposal contains provisions empowering the Commission to adopt delegated acts in accordance with Article 290 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.