

Revision of the Weights and Dimensions Directive

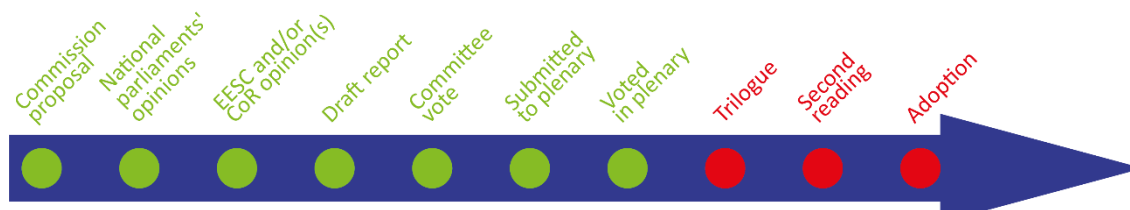
OVERVIEW

In July 2023, the Commission tabled a package of proposals for the greening of freight transport. Among the three proposals is one on the revision of the Weights and Dimensions Directive, which sets limits for heavy goods vehicles in international road transport. The proposal seeks to further promote use of zero-emission trucks by allowing these to exceed the standard weight limits. It also seeks to clarify the rules on use of heavier and longer vehicles in cross-border transport operations between countries where such vehicles are allowed, promote intermodal transport and simplify administrative procedures, while also improving enforcement of the rules.

In the European Parliament, the file has been referred to the Committee on Transport and Tourism (TRAN), which has appointed Isabel García Muñoz (S&D, Spain) as rapporteur. She published her draft report on 20 October 2023. The TRAN committee adopted its report on 14 February. Parliament adopted its first reading position during the March 2024 plenary session.

Directive of the European Parliament and the Council amending Council Directive 96/53/EC laying down for certain road vehicles circulating within the Community the maximum authorised dimensions in national and international traffic and the maximum authorised weights in international traffic

<i>Committee responsible:</i>	Transport and Tourism (TRAN)	COM(2023) 445 2023/0265 (COD)
<i>Rapporteur:</i>	Isabel García Muñoz (S&D, Spain)	
<i>Shadow rapporteurs:</i>	Markus Ferber (EPP, Germany) Elsi Katainen (Renew, Finland) Ciarán Cuffe (Greens/EFA, Ireland) Peter Lundgren (ECR, Sweden) Kateřina Konečná (The Left, Czechia)	Ordinary legislative procedure (COD) (Parliament and Council on equal footing – formerly 'co-decision')
<i>Next steps expected:</i>	Opening of trilogue negotiations	



Introduction

Trucks and buses are responsible for 28 % of road transport greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and 34 % of road transport nitrogen oxide emissions.

The proposal to revise the Weights and Dimensions Directive is designed to support the climate neutrality objectives set out in the European Green Deal, and the European Climate Law. More specifically, the proposal reflects the Commission's intentions as set out in the [sustainable and smart mobility strategy](#) (SSMS), which lists actions in the EU transport system to achieve climate neutrality.

In the SSMS, the Commission identified the revision of the directive as one of the key measures that can effectively stimulate demand for zero-emission vehicles and promote intermodal transport. It is part of a package of proposals known as the [greening of freight package](#), tabled in July 2023.

According to Commission figures, uptake of zero-emission vehicles has been limited within the EU truck fleet, with 96.3 % of all trucks in the EU running on diesel. The yearly registration of zero-emission trucks grew from 0.6 % in 2016 to 7 % in 2020.

Existing situation

The [directive](#) currently in force sets out maximum authorised weights and dimensions for heavy-duty vehicles (HDVs) that move on EU roads and carry goods or passengers. By ensuring that HDVs do not exceed the limits, the rules aim to preserve free movement of goods, secure fair competition, improve road safety and prevent damage to road infrastructure.

Amendments to the directive adopted in 2015 and 2019 allowed higher weights and/or dimensions for energy efficient and less polluting vehicles, and brought in rules to improve vehicles' aerodynamics and ensure interoperability with other modes of transport.

The evaluation of the directive carried out in 2022 showed that it had been effective in promoting road safety and protecting road infrastructure as well as easing use of road vehicles in containerised intermodal transport. However, the directive was falling short on developing a level playing field and on environmental aspects. The problems included market fragmentation for longer and heavier vehicles, and ineffective and inconsistent enforcement. According to the Commission, unclear or absent rules in the directive have resulted in diverging interpretations and control practices, which hamper the free movement of HDVs within the EU, distort competition and lead to a loss of energy efficiency.

Parliament's starting position

Parliament has expressed strong support for the Green Deal and favours ambitious greening of transport initiatives. For example, in its January 2020 [resolution](#) on the Green Deal, Parliament welcomed the forthcoming strategy on sustainable and smart mobility, and supported the view that all modes of transport should contribute to the decarbonisation of the transport sector.

Preparation of the proposal

A number of consultations took place in the run-up to the publication of the proposal in the context of the ex-post evaluation of the directive and the development of the impact assessment accompanying the proposal. These included a consultation on the [call for evidence](#) (January to February 2022), a [public consultation](#) (April to July 2022), a stakeholder survey (September to October 2022), two workshops targeting industry stakeholders and Member States (December 2022). In addition, two external studies were carried out by an independent consortium led by Transport & Mobility Leuven and Ramboll Management Consulting.

The [impact assessment report](#) accompanying the proposal outlines the benefits and costs of the favoured policy scenario as follows. EPRS has published an [initial appraisal](#) of the impact assessment.

For national authorities, the scenario favoured in the impact assessment would result in net costs savings of €21.5 billion

Costs for national public authorities include the maintenance of road infrastructure given to the extra weight allowance for zero-emission vehicles, and the updating of the bridges and tunnels. Meanwhile, cost savings would come from the reduced need for road infrastructure maintenance, driven by the decrease in the number of trips owing inter alia to the increase in the payload of trucks. Further cost savings would come from reduced administrative costs relating to reduced manual checks through use of weigh in motion (WIM) systems and costs savings in permit processing following the creation of national-level one stop shops.

For road transport operators, the favoured scenario would result in net cost savings of €45.1 billion (present value over 2025 to 2050 relative to the baseline). The costs envisaged for transport operators are estimated for those operators who were previously operating overloaded trucks but would now have to comply with the weight limits. Road transport operators are expected to benefit from reduced time required for cooperating with the public authorities for weight checks and requesting permits. They should also benefit from the reduction in operation costs driven, for example, by the increase in the average payload and the reduction in the number of trips (owing to the extra length and weight permitted).

The favoured scenario is expected to bring external cost savings in CO₂ emissions estimated at €3.5 billion (present value over 2025 to 2050 relative to the baseline), for air pollutant emissions (€2.1 billion) and noise emissions (€0.7 billion), enabled by zero emission HDVs, more intermodal transport and the decrease in the number of trips due to the increased payload.

The changes the proposal would bring

The [proposal](#) seeks to help increase uptake of zero-emission HDVs and intermodal transport, tackle fragmentation of the market for longer and heavier vehicles, and improve enforcement of the rules.

To incentivise the take-up of cleaner vehicles, the proposal allows additional weight for vehicles using zero-emission technologies, as these increase the weight of HDVs (by 4 tonnes). It is proposed that the extra allowance would be disconnected from the weight of the zero-emission technology, to provide further incentives for uptake of such vehicles, as the operators will gain additional loading capacity if the zero-emission technology becomes lighter.

In order to help improve safety, driver comfort of drivers, and increase energy efficiency of vehicles, the rules also encourage the uptake of more aerodynamic cabins and other energy-saving devices.

Furthermore, the proposed rules clarify that countries that allow European modular systems (EMS) will also be able to use them in international operations among the neighbouring EU countries that allow EMS, without the need for a bilateral agreement and without the restriction of crossing only one border.

The rules aim to promote intermodal transport by classifying trucks, trailers and semi-trailers used in intermodal transport operations as intermodal transport units that will benefit from the same extra weight allowance as road vehicles that carry containers or swap bodies. A new allowance for extra height will also facilitate the transport of so-called high-cube containers.

To further support the transition to zero-emission operations, the proposal sets a target date (end of 2034) after which heavier HDVs (44 tonnes) used in international transport must be zero-emission or used for intermodal operations.

The proposal provides for more harmonisation of administrative requirements relating to permit issuing and includes measures that make enforcement more targeted and more efficient thanks to the use of weighing mechanisms to be installed in road infrastructure.

Advisory committees

This legislative procedure requires consultation of both the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the European Committee of the Regions (CoR).

In its 25 October 2023 [opinion](#), EESC stresses that all cross-border EMSs need to be zero emission eventually and endorses the proposal to allow extra weight of 4 tonnes for zero-emission trucks. It nonetheless calls for rigorous monitoring after adoption of the rules. It also calls for EMSs to avoid routes posing risks to cyclists and pedestrians. The EESC expresses concern about the directive possibly having an adverse effect on the modal shift and stresses that investment and infrastructure modifications will be needed to support the increase in traffic and for zero-emission vehicle charging and refuelling infrastructure.

National parliaments

National parliaments were invited to scrutinise the proposal for any subsidiarity issues by [8 November 2023](#). No subsidiarity concerns were raised.

Stakeholder views¹

According to the Commission, various issues were raised by stakeholders during the consultation, including the lack of uniform EU rules on cross-border transport between Member States allowing longer and heavier vehicles and the directive's failure to address the energy efficiency of road transport effectively. Some stakeholders suggested raising the maximum weights and dimensions of HDVs to compensate for the size and weight of zero-emission technologies; while many stakeholders supported allowing cross-border transport by heavier and/or longer vehicles between neighbouring EU countries that permit the same standards for weights or dimensions on their territories, some Member States and stakeholders expressed concern about the effects of such measures on road infrastructure and a potential modal backshift from rail to road. Stakeholders also supported the simplification of administrative processes for permits.

Following the publication of the proposal, a number of stakeholders have given their initial views.

The International Road Transport Union ([IRU](#)) noted that the proposal offers opportunities for transport companies to improve operational efficiency and also reduce emissions, but expressed concern about two issues in particular – limiting the flexibility of the use of traditional standard vehicle combinations in international transport after 2035 and limiting cross-border trials with the European modular system to a 5-year period.

[European truck and bus manufacturers](#) felt encouraged by some elements in the proposal such as the extra weight and length allowance for zero-emission HDVs. Nonetheless, they warned that the extra allowance zero emission HDVs would only support the industry's zero-emission transition if accompanied by increases in maximum axle loads. They were also pleased to see that the Commission had recognised that diverging rules for longer and heavier vehicles at Member State level had had a negative impact on transport efficiency.

Non-governmental organisation Transport & Environment ([T&E](#)) welcomed the decision to increase weight limits in the directive, as this would help accelerate the uptake of electric and hydrogen trucks. They cautioned that longer and heavier trucks should only be allowed to travel across borders if they were zero emission, avoided urban roads and did not compete with rail.

Legislative process

The proposal was tabled on 11 July 2023. Discussions in the Council started on 13 July 2023. In Parliament, the Transport and Tourism Committee (TRAN) was assigned to take the lead and appointed Isabel García Muñoz (S&D, Spain) as rapporteur. The Commission presented the proposal in TRAN on [9 October 2023](#). The rapporteur issued her [draft report](#) on 20 October 2023 and the TRAN committee adopted its [report](#) on 14 February 2024. The Parliament voted on the [report](#) on

12 March 2024. This text constitutes Parliament's first reading position on the file, to be taken forward in the next legislative term after the elections of 6-9 June.

The Parliament report proposes to increase the maximum weight of zero-emission trucks by four tonnes, to compensate the space and weight needed to fit battery or hydrogen cells, and to provide additional loading capacity.

The report strengthens the governance framework applying to European modular systems (EMS), with a prior assessment for the impacts on road safety, road infrastructure, modal cooperation and the environment. MEPs also call for ensuring that drivers of EMS have the training needed to handle heavier and longer vehicles and vehicle combinations.

A dedicated EU web portal should be set up to provide information about the roads where EMS are allowed to circulate (as well as the national maximum authorised weights and dimensions of vehicles in Member States).

To help road users identify the type of vehicle (before overtaking, for example), Parliament is also proposing an EU label to indicate the length of the HDVs or such vehicle combinations.

To improve enforcement, the report would oblige Member States to install certified automatic systems that recognise vehicles exceeding maximum weight limits, and would propose that Member States implement intelligent access policies to regulate and monitor the access of heavy duty vehicles to specific roads. It also recommends that they use revenues generated from the fines under the directive to support sustainable and intermodal transport and smart enforcement.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT SUPPORTING ANALYSIS

Tuominen M., [Maximum authorised weights and dimensions for certain road vehicles](#), EPRS, European Parliament, November 2023.

OTHER SOURCES

[Heavy duty road vehicles: weights and dimensions](#), Legislative Observatory (OEIL), European Parliament.

ENDNOTE

- ¹ This section aims to provide a flavour of the debate and is not intended to be an exhaustive account of all different views on the proposal. Additional information can be found in related publications listed under 'European Parliament supporting analysis'.

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