



REAR VIEW AND BLIND SPOT MIRRORS

23155 5111/02 COM (01) 811	Draft Directive of the European Parliament and the Council relating to the type approval of mirrors and supplementary systems for indirect vision and of vehicles with these devices and amending Directive 70/156/EEC.
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Legal base:	Article 95 of the EC Treaty; consultation; qualified majority voting
Document originated:	7 January 2002
Deposited in Parliament:	6 February 2002
Department:	Transport
Basis of consideration:	EM of 20 February 2002
Previous Committee Report:	None
To be discussed in Council:	Unknown
Committee's assessment:	Politically important
Committee's decision:	Cleared, but further information requested

Background

7.1 A number of accidents are caused when drivers are unaware of other road users near their vehicles because of the existence of blind spots around the vehicles, especially goods vehicles. Directive 71/127/EEC sets out the current technical standards for rear-view mirrors of vehicles. But under the Directive, Member States have discretion to limit the application of the Directive to light and heavy commercial vehicles. For example, in the UK, existing UK legislation does not require the fitting of mirrors to certain heavy goods vehicles to specifically address the blind spot that lies directly under the front windscreen. In the recent past, the lack of a clear view of the front of the

vehicle has caused a number of fatalities when drivers have driven forward unaware that a child was crossing the road in front of the stationary vehicle. The Government estimates that the elimination of this blind spot could save around 16 fatalities per year in the UK. There are also blind spots at the side of certain other vehicles which are not dealt with under existing rules.

The document

7.2 The existing Directive will be replaced by the proposed Directive. The Minister summarised the main changes proposed as follows:

"— the Directive would be mandatory (i.e. it would have to be applied to all categories of vehicle, except motorcycles) — the current Directive only has to be applied to light and heavy commercial vehicles if Member States choose;

- additional mirrors would be required on certain vehicles in order to increase the driver's field of vision:
- front mirrors on trucks,
- exterior rear-view mirrors on the passenger's side of cars,
- certain technical characteristics of mirrors would be modified in order to increase the field of vision, including an increase in the permitted protrusion from cars;
- certain mirrors could be replaced by alternatives, such as camera/monitor systems; and
- the provisions in the existing mirrors Directive (71/127/EEC) regarding type-approval and conformity of production procedures would not be included in the new Directive — these aspects would be covered by the Framework Directive (70/156/EEC)."

The Government's view

7.3 The Minister tells us in his Explanatory Memorandum that blind spots are a significant problem for drivers of large vehicles in the UK. He says:

"UK legislation currently requires new heavy goods vehicles over 12 tonnes to be fitted with additional 'close proximity' and (in the case of articulated vehicles) 'wide angle' mirrors to address blind spots to the sides of the vehicle. However, there are currently no requirements for mirrors to cover the blind spot which exists below the windscreen of many high vehicles.

"The main effect of this directive will be to require new goods vehicles over 3.5 tonnes to be equipped with a mirror to cover this blind spot. The

additional mirror may be combined with one of the vehicle's existing mirrors. Where a mirror is not feasible a camera system, may be used instead."

7.4 The Directive also extends the requirement to fit wide angle and close proximity mirrors to goods vehicles in the 3.5 to 12 tonne range. This measure will also apply to left hand drive EU registered vehicles which can currently use UK roads without close proximity mirrors and can cause particular risks in certain traffic conditions, such as when changing lane on a motorway.

7.5 The Minister tells us that the proposed measures can make a significant contribution to the Government's road casualty reduction targets. However, he also says that there are certain aspects of the proposal that could be improved. For example, he says that while a proposal to require the exterior mirrors to cars and light goods vehicles to incorporate "aspheric" zones as used in many car mirrors would provide a wider view of blind spots, these larger mirrors pose an increased risk to pedestrians and cyclists. The Minister says that the benefits achieved by providing wider vision to drivers may be offset by the increased risks from the slightly larger mirrors. The measures will be examined as part of the Regulatory Impact Assessment.

7.6 The Minister says that, as a conservative estimate, the casualty savings of requiring the fitting of additional mirrors on goods vehicles could be around £16 million per year whereas the cost of fitting the additional mirrors would total around £3 million per year. The Minister also suggests that it might be more beneficial to require blind spot mirrors to be fitted on buses (which are not addressed in the Directive) than cars.

Conclusion

7.7 The use of blind spot mirrors and other measures to improve drivers' vision and so reduce road casualties are clearly to be welcomed. However, we note the Minister's comments that certain aspects of the proposal could be improved. In clearing the document, we call upon the Minister to press the case for incorporating these improvements in the text.

7.8 The Minister has provided an indication of the likely scale of costs and benefits associated with certain aspects of the proposal. However, we call upon the Minister to provide a full Regulatory Impact Assessment as soon as possible. We also ask the Minister to clarify whether the fitting or non-fitting of the proposed mirrors would have any legal and insurance consequences for motorists, especially in the event of an accident.

7.9 Meanwhile, we are content to clear the document.