

## POSITION PAPER

### Revision of the Weights and Dimensions Directive

CLECAT, the European Association for Forwarding, Transport, Logistics and Customs Services, welcomes the initiative to revise [Directive 96/53/EC](#), setting standards for the maximum authorised weights and dimensions of heavy-duty vehicles used in national and international transport. In line with the EU climate ambitions and to alleviate the structural shortage of drivers affecting road transport supply chains, the revision of the Directive should contribute to a more efficient and low-emission transport system and harmonised rules for cross-border operations.

The primary objective of the Directive is to establish weights and dimensions requirements for heavy-duty vehicles to ensure compatibility across the European Union and a level playing field with respect to competition. Core elements of the Directive have already been in place for a long time. However, CLECAT observes that the discrepancy between the maximum authorised weights in some Member States' territory and maximum authorised weight for cross-border transport hinders the free movement of goods, leading to inefficiencies and higher emissions. This makes the Directive no longer aligned with new EU priorities such as decarbonisation of transport. As well as undermining the Single Market, the existing patchwork of national rules has also led to legal and investment uncertainty.

The balance between the different provisions should now be reassessed and where necessary be updated to ensure they are in line with the priorities of decarbonisation and GHG emission reduction. This position paper provides some proposals for amendments of the Directive which CLECAT considers crucial to face the current and upcoming challenges of the road transport industry.

#### Key messages of European Freight Forwarders

- Increase the current 40-tonne weight limitation for border crossings to 44 tonnes and the maximum weight of lorries taking part in intermodal/combined transport operations to 46 tonnes.
- Maintain the possibility to authorise cross-border transport operations with heavier/longer vehicles between the bordering Member States that allow their circulation in national traffic
- Authorise the use of European Modular system (EMS) vehicles in the EU as a general rule, at least along the TEN-T core and comprehensive network.
- Maintain a level-playing field for zero-emissions vehicles
- Extend the scope of the Directive to exceptional transport as this type of transport would benefit from harmonisation of legislation and rules.

### **Authorise cross-border operations of 44-tonne trucks**

The current Directive restricts the maximum authorised weights of vehicles used in international traffic to 40 tonnes, but allows Member States to increase this maximum weight for vehicles used in national traffic. As such, many Member States allow 44-tonne trucks to circulate on their territory. **CLECAT proposes to increase the general 40-tonne weight limitation for border crossings in the EU to 44 tonnes. This should also be accompanied by a harmonisation of the national rules with regards to weight distribution and axle loading** in order to have a level-playing field between road transport undertakings.

Raising the maximum weight to 44 tonnes in international traffic would help to avoid the situation in which two neighbouring countries allow the circulation of 44-tonne vehicles on their territory, but restrict border crossing to 40-tonne trucks only. This leads to inefficiencies for the road transport supply chain, with increased journeys, increased number of vehicles on the road and increased emissions: as an example, between France and Belgium, the 40-tonne limitation leads to an 15% increase of Belgian HDVs crossing the border to France, often not fully loaded. This equals to an average annual increase of 26,000 additional vehicles – and their associated emissions – crossing the border which could have been avoided if the maximum authorised weight were raised to 44 tonnes.

In parallel, CLECAT maintains that **the EU legal framework should not overrule national rules on weights and dimensions and should not restrict the possibility to authorise cross-border transport operations with heavier/longer vehicles between consenting Member States** that allow their circulation in national traffic, as it is already the case between Finland and Sweden for example.

### **Increase the maximum authorised weight for multimodal transport operations**

CLECAT would welcome the **increase of the maximum weight of lorries taking part in all multimodal transport operations across the EU, including intermodal and combined transport, to 46 tonnes.** Such an extension of heavier load authorisations for these types of operations would serve as a non-financial incentive to promote a shift to multimodal transport and thereby support reaching the EU climate ambitions. In this regard, we welcome the initiative of the French government which just started a pilot with the adoption of a [decree](#) allowing the circulation of 46-tonne trucks used in combined transport operations.

It is essential that a scheme for authorising heavier loads for multimodal transport should be introduced uniformly throughout all Member States. Special attention should be paid to the cross-border application of such authorisations to avoid situations in which a Member State does not accept a heavier load authorisation granted by another Member State on its territory.

In addition, the Directive should allow for more type of combination to use in intermodal transport operations, such as entire trailers fitted on trains. As such, mixed operations for rail transport (conventional wagons, containers and entire trailers put together on a same train) should be allowed and supported- ideally at EU level - to promote multimodal transport and a shift to rail.

### **Promote the use of high-capacity vehicles in cross-border operations**

The current rules as laid down in Article 4 of the Directive limits a more efficient use of the current road infrastructure: It does not allow the cross-border use of high-capacity vehicles - HCVs, 25.25 metres long and 44 tonnes or above, including the European Modular System (EMS) - beyond two consenting Member States. As such, CLECAT encourages policies that allow the high-capacity transport system in the international road freight transport: To fully address the issue of fragmentation and to provide investment and legal certainty, **we would therefore support authorising the use of EMS vehicles for international transport in the EU as a general rule, at least along the TEN-T core and comprehensive network.**

As the overall demand for freight transport is expected to significantly increase over the next years/decades, there is a need to absorb this demand by all modes of transport. Allowing HCVs, designed to carry more cargo than standard trucks, could thus provide a highly effective solution. The HCVs have the potential of reducing costs and offering higher productivity than regular heavy goods vehicles, as they can consolidate freight from smaller trucks, consume less fuel and produce less emissions per unit of cargo transported. For example, two or three HCVs may carry as much cargo as three to five standard vehicles. It has also been estimated that HCVs can reduce carbon emissions per unit of freight by 15-40%, depending on the vehicle configuration and use<sup>1</sup>. As a result, this makes HCVs more cost-effective and environmentally friendly than regular vehicle combinations. Importantly, experience also suggests that their use has not substituted rail or inland waterway travel, but rather led to their replacement of conventional trucks. This is because the choice of mode is rather determined by factors such as the distance travelled, the value of goods transported or their volume, all of which can differ between road, rail and maritime.

The International Transport Forum has also been recommending the wider use of HCVs in its 2019 report '[High Capacity Transport Towards Efficient, Safe and Sustainable Road Freight](#)'. The report notes that HCVs provide an opportunity to improve transport efficiency by increasing the cargo capacity of the vehicle, carrying higher mass, volume or both. Fewer truck trips are required per freight task, which reduces truck travel, lowers carbon dioxide and NOx emissions, cuts fuel use and lowers shipping costs.'

Overall, allowing cross-border operations with HCV/EMS vehicles would help operators and customers alike optimising the utilisation of trucks and trailers, road infrastructure capacity, and integration with other modes of transport such as rail, air, inland and short-sea shipping for the door-to-door logistics solutions. The use of longer and heavier trucks would also bring more efficiency to supply chains by alleviating the structural shortage of drivers, which is expected to worsen in the coming years.

Finally, several studies conclude that there is no clear evidence that longer combinations of vehicles would decrease road safety. A safety study on transport in Sweden<sup>2</sup> quoted by the ITF report found that combinations exceeding the EU length limit of 18.75m were involved in less fatal or severe crashes per billion vehicle/km/tonne than regular European Union combination freight vehicles. A [review of the data](#) in the 2019 International Transport Forum study also indicated a reduced accident rate in all countries surveyed worldwide for high capacity vehicles compared to conventional trucks.

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<sup>1</sup> International Transport Forum (2019), *High Capacity Transport Towards Efficient, Safe and Sustainable Road Freight*.

<sup>2</sup> Bálint, A. et al. (2014), *Accident analysis for traffic safety aspects of High Capacity Transports*. Final Report v.2, Chalmers

Additionally, the Steer Davies Gleave report "[A review of megatrucks – Major issues and case studies](#)" published in 2013 for the European Parliament noted that longer combinations of vehicles might even improve safety due to reduced truck mileage.

### **Provide a level-playing field for alternatively fuelled trucks**

CLECAT is of the view that the wider use of longer and/or heavier vehicles should not be limited to alternatively fuelled trucks. **The Directive should not favour a specific propulsion technology over another by allowing heavier loads.** We consider that the decarbonisation of road transport would be better addressed through the upcoming revision of the CO2 standards for heavy-duty vehicles, as the Weights and Dimensions Directive should remain technology neutral by not providing specific incentives for certain types of vehicles.

However, we understand that alternative powertrains, especially zero-emission vehicles, generally have a higher weight than conventional vehicles when empty: battery-electric or hydrogen-powered trucks require heavy batteries which would therefore entail a potential loss of payload for the same maximum authorised weight. **It is therefore important to adjust the provisions of the Directive with regards to zero-emission vehicles to maintain an equal payload and a level playing field with conventional trucks.**

Similarly, light duty ZEVs up to 4.25t should be exempted from the scope of the Directive in line with EU transport legislation, to accommodate for the additional weight and space required to house the alternative propulsion while maintaining range requirements.

### **Other elements**

CLECAT would support **an extension of the scope of the Directive to exceptional transport** (i.e. abnormal loads) as this type of transport would benefit from harmonisation of legislation and rules, especially with regards to permit-granting procedures. The guidelines on abnormal road transport (from 2008) should also be reviewed according to the most recent national legal developments, and a harmonised framework for permit granting procedures should be proposed.

National processes for administrative procedures including for the granting of permits could also be simplified. In Germany, for example, transport operators must apply to the relevant state authority for permission to use EMS on specific national routes. Once the requested route is approved, a new legislative process begins to amend the corresponding regulation, creating continued uncertainty over their use. To address this uncertainty, the European Commission should establish clear and harmonised rules for all EU Member States that simplify the process, increase transparency and provide greater legal certainty for transport operators.

Finally, **providing length allowances for aerodynamic devices could contribute to the reduction of fuel consumption and CO2 emissions of heavy-duty vehicles.** This solution is optimal for long and medium-distance operations. However, there could be increased costs for operators, such as workshop maintenance, due to inadaptable infrastructure when loading, circulating and unloading goods.

CLECAT remains at the disposal of interested parties for any further information.



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