



# **Briefing: Road Safety Priorities for the EU in 2026**

**Memorandum to the Cypriot Presidency of the Council of the European Union**

**January 2026**

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# Introduction

The Cypriot Presidency of the Council of the European Union, from January to July 2026, takes place against a backdrop of considerable geopolitical and economic uncertainty. The European Union faces continued instability in its neighbourhood, rising living costs, and complex challenges tied to the climate and industrial transitions. In this environment, the EU must remain focused on policy areas that deliver high social value, protect lives, and support a resilient and inclusive Europe. One such area is road safety.

This briefing from the European Transport Safety Council (ETSC) outlines the key EU road safety policy files expected to be in progress during the Cypriot Presidency and highlights urgent priorities for legislative action, investment, and oversight.

We are now halfway through the EU Road Safety Policy Framework for 2020–2030. The collective objective to halve road deaths and serious injuries by 2030 remains both urgent and achievable. But progress is alarmingly off track. In 2024, 20,017 people died on EU roads. Over the last decade, the EU27 has achieved only a 17% reduction in road deaths—far below the pace needed to meet the 2030 target. From 2014 to 2019, progress stalled at just a 6% reduction. Since then, the trend has barely improved: deaths fell by only 1% in 2023 and 2% in 2024.

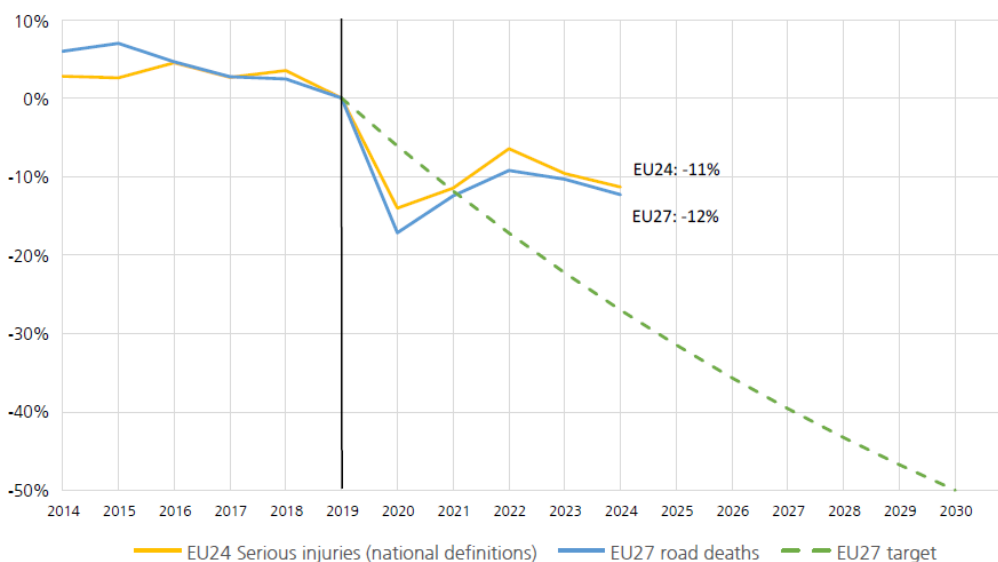


Figure 1. Change in the number of road deaths in the EU27 since 2014 compared with the EU target for 2030 and change in the number of serious road traffic injuries.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> EU24: EU27 excluding RO due to lack of updated data and LT and IE due to inconsistent trend data. EU27 level of road deaths in 2024 and EU24 level of serious road traffic injuries in 2024 are an ETSC

In its first-ever report on road safety, the European Court of Auditors (ECA) warned that the EU and its Member States must “move their efforts up a gear” to stay on track.<sup>2</sup> The cost of inaction is measured not only in thousands of preventable deaths, but also in billions of euros in healthcare, economic, and social losses.

At a time when the EU is working to strengthen its strategic autonomy, road safety policy remains a proven European success story. Safe, clean, and efficient mobility underpins the functioning of the single market, supports climate and modal shift goals, and provides a clear, visible benefit to citizens in their daily lives.

A proposal to revise EU rules on periodic vehicle inspections is on its way to adoption, and a mid-term evaluation of the EU Road Safety Policy Framework delayed from 2025 is now even more eagerly awaited in 2026. ETSC has outlined its full set of priorities for the 2024–2030 mandate in a separate briefing.<sup>3</sup>

Preparations for the next EU budget are also underway. This budget will be crucial for the future of road safety in Europe. The current Strategic Action Plan on Road Safety includes funding measures supported by the 2021–2027 budget. That support must not only continue, but be reinforced. EU funds should be targeted at the measures within the 2020–2030 Road Safety Programme with the highest proven lifesaving potential.<sup>4</sup>

The European Court of Auditors report warned that safety is often not prioritised when EU funds are allocated to transport projects. Without stronger prioritisation rules, reductions in road safety investment are likely. ETSC calls for road safety to be fully integrated into the EU’s budget planning and for it to be included in the Commission’s country-specific recommendations under the European Semester process.

The Cypriot Presidency has an important opportunity and responsibility to place road safety firmly back at the centre of the EU agenda. By demanding stronger accountability for results, and ensuring that future EU funding decisions prioritise measures with proven lifesaving impact, the Presidency can help close the widening gap between ambition and reality.

Without renewed political leadership and sustained investment, the 2030 targets will be missed. The Cypriot Presidency should make road safety a visible, deliverable priority that demonstrates the EU’s capacity to act where it matters most.

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estimate as road deaths and serious injury data for 2024 were not available for some countries at the time this report went to print.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/news/NEWS-SR-2024-04>

<sup>3</sup> ETSC (2024) Road Safety Priorities for the EU 2024-2029 <https://tinyurl.com/mr4273rp>

<sup>4</sup> EC (2019) Road Safety Strategy <https://tinyurl.com/49tdbjse>

# Enhancing EU Roadworthiness Rules: Extending Checks to All Vehicle Types

A revision of the EU roadworthiness package was published in April 2025. The framework was last updated in 2014 and consists of Directive 2014/45/EC on periodic roadworthiness tests, Directive 2014/47/EC on technical roadside inspections of commercial vehicles, and Directive 2014/46/EC on vehicle registration requirements. With Europe's vehicle fleet ageing and new safety technologies becoming standard, ETSC stresses the urgent need to adapt inspection regimes to today's risk profile.<sup>5</sup>

Both national and EU law require motorists to keep their vehicles in a roadworthy condition. In practice, however, not all vehicle owners do so. Periodic roadworthiness testing exists to ensure that a vehicle's original safety performance, as designed and manufactured, is retained throughout its service life. There is a clear correlation between the severity of collisions and vehicle age and mileage, underlining the need for more frequent technical controls as vehicles age. Moreover, a recent European Court of Auditors report noted that the flagship EU General Safety Regulation, which applies to all new vehicles sold from July this year, will not deliver the expected reductions in deaths because Europeans are replacing their vehicles less frequently.<sup>6</sup> This ageing fleet makes effective roadworthiness checks even more important. The European Commission has proposed annual roadworthiness testing for vehicles over ten years old, a measure regrettably not taken up by the Transport Council in its December General Approach.<sup>7</sup>

Since the law's last revision in 2014, both vehicles and electronically controlled in-vehicle safety systems have developed rapidly, while automated vehicles are beginning to appear on European roads. The Commission proposal states that new mandatory safety technologies, required on new types of vehicles in the EU since 2022, as well as other driver assistance systems, would be subject to regular checks to ensure they continue to function correctly.

Vehicle examiners need to ensure a rigorous testing regime for new in-vehicle technologies mandated under the 2019 General Safety Regulation, such as Automated Emergency Braking systems. Assisted and automated driving systems must also be regularly assessed within the framework of periodic roadworthiness testing to verify their ongoing safety performance.

Beyond maintaining the list of systems proposed by the Commission, the co-legislators should

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<sup>5</sup> ETSC Position Paper Roadworthiness of Vehicles (Updated 2025) <https://tinyurl.com/y5bww7m2>

<sup>6</sup> European Court of Auditors (2024) Reaching EU road safety objectives, Time to move up a Gear <https://tinyurl.com/4294wr74>

<sup>7</sup> Transport Council, General Approach (December 2025) <https://tinyurl.com/ytps2ra9>

incorporate necessary improvements and corrections in the final legislation, for example by adding several systems mandated under the General Safety Regulation that were omitted from the original proposal.

Technical failures in powered two-wheelers (PTWs) can lead to far more severe consequences than similar failures in cars. The condition of a PTW at the time of a crash can significantly affect both the likelihood of a collision and the severity of injuries sustained.

Currently, over half of the EU's 27 Member States require motorcycles to undergo periodic roadworthiness testing. The European Commission has proposed extending mandatory testing across the EU to include all motorcycles with an engine capacity over 125cc. This would remove the existing exemptions in a few countries and establish a consistent minimum standard.

However, under the new Commission proposal, mopeds and motorcycles up to and including 125cc would remain excluded from mandatory testing. The Transport Council has ruled that the current exemption can stay as long as 'alternative measures' are taken such as roadside inspections.<sup>8</sup> ETSC recommends a more comprehensive approach: all motor vehicles, including all categories of motorcycles, should undergo roadworthiness testing four years after first registration, followed by tests every two years and annually thereafter. These vehicles should also be subject to roadside checks.

The European Commission has proposed extending roadside checks on commercial vehicles to include vans, as well as introducing inspections focused on cargo securing. This is a welcome development. The number of vans on Europe's roads continues to grow, and data on road collisions show that deaths involving light goods vehicles are comparable to those involving heavy goods vehicles. The EC proposed a 2% target, which ETSC sees as a modest and necessary target given the explosion in delivery traffic. However, the Council has replaced this with a target based on 10% of the *number* of Heavy Duty Vehicle (HDV) inspections.<sup>9</sup>

Yet, a simple calculation shows that this represents a 96% reduction in enforcement ambition, effectively giving a free pass to unsafe vans on the road. Moreover, the Council proposes that Member States that require annual technical inspections of vans do not need to carry out roadside checks at all.

Random roadside checks are essential to ensuring that vans, which are subject to heavy use, are properly maintained. Including vans in regular roadside inspections is therefore a necessary step toward improving road safety.<sup>10</sup> As with heavy goods vehicles, vans should be

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<sup>8</sup> Transport Council, General Approach (December 2025) <https://tinyurl.com/ytps2ra9>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> ETSC Position Paper Roadworthiness of Vehicles. (Updated 2025) <https://tinyurl.com/y5bww7m2>

selected for roadside inspection using risk-based profiling. This approach ensures that enforcement focuses on high-risk transport operators, while reducing unnecessary checks on operators who consistently maintain their vehicles to a high standard.<sup>11</sup>

For ETSC's full position on the roadworthiness proposals, see:

<https://etsc.eu/etsc-position-paper-roadworthiness-of-vehicles/>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

# Road Safety in the EU Budget: A Smart Investment with High Returns

The European Commission set out proposals for the next long-term EU budget, known as the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), covering the seven years 2028-2034 in July 2025.

The current EU Strategic Action Plan on Road Safety is supported by the 2021–2027 EU budget. Going forward, EU funds should continue to support the implementation of the EU Road Safety Programme 2020–2030 - particularly the measures with the greatest potential to save lives and prevent serious injuries. Both deaths and serious injuries on the roads impose a heavy social and economic burden. That’s why it is essential that the next EU budget includes strong financial support for effective, evidence-based road safety measures.

ETSC continues to call for the establishment of a dedicated EU Road Safety Agency to coordinate and support efforts across Member States and to ensure safe rollout of assisted and automated driving consistently across the EU and has recently written to President von der Leyen to set this out.<sup>12</sup>

A key priority for the new budget period should be improving road infrastructure safety. Any EU funds allocated to the construction of new roads and the upgrading of existing infrastructure must be used to enhance safety. The revised TEN-T Regulation, adopted in 2024, now explicitly refers to two important EU directives - Directive 2019/1936 (on road infrastructure safety management) and Directive 2004/54 (on road tunnel safety) - and requires Member States to apply their provisions across the entire TEN-T network.

A recent report by the European Court of Auditors (ECA) found that road safety was often not a central consideration when EU funds were allocated to infrastructure projects. Specifically, project selection criteria frequently failed to prioritise accident hotspots, meaning that opportunities to save lives were being missed.<sup>13</sup> This must now be reversed in this new MFF round. The ECA report<sup>14</sup> stressed that new prioritisation rules must be introduced to protect and strengthen this spending, to date these are still lacking.

One of ETSC’s other priorities for funding includes improving urban road safety. ETSC welcomed the new TEN-T ‘urban nodes’ in the recent revision of TEN-T Regulation and the need for them to adopt Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMPs), which should also include road safety actions and targets by 2027. EU funds should be available to help cities to

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<sup>12</sup>ETSC Joint Letter Calling for an EU Road Safety Agency <https://tinyurl.com/bdfa9ew2>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Court of Auditors (2024) Report on Road Safety <https://tinyurl.com/3ssn6n9h>



implement them. ETSC would welcome funds to be spent on practical, high-impact measures in TEN-T urban nodes, especially for first- and last-mile connections - for example, protected cycle lanes, safer pedestrian crossings, and the implementation of 30 km/h zones where appropriate. These are simple, well-proven interventions.

The new National Regional and Partnership Plans, to be developed by EU Member States must then be sure to allocate sufficient budget for road infrastructure safety improvements. Finally, feedback and guidance from the European Commission will be crucial. ETSC calls for road safety to be systematically included in the Commission's country-specific recommendations and evaluation of the plans.

For ETSC's full position paper on the new EU budget see:

<https://etsc.eu/eu-multiannual-financial-framework-2028-2034-funds-for-road-safety/>

# Vehicle Safety

## Automotive Omnibus and Small Electric Cars

The “Automotive Omnibus” presented on 16 December 2025 reflects sustained lobbying from parts of the car industry. In May, senior executives from Renault and Stellantis publicly called for lighter regulatory requirements for small cars, arguing that this would reduce costs and improve competitiveness against imports. While ETSC supports efforts to make cleaner mobility more affordable, this must not come at the expense of road safety.

ETSC therefore welcomes the European Commission’s decision to classify the new “Small Electric Vehicle” (M1E) sub-category within the existing passenger car (M1) category. This approach ensures that these vehicles remain subject to the full set of EU vehicle safety requirements, avoiding the creation of a separate class of lower-standard vehicles.

However, ETSC is deeply concerned by the Commission’s explicit intention to use this new definition to freeze safety requirements for M1E vehicles for a period of ten years. The proposal justifies this freeze by citing development costs, but fails to adequately consider the real-world operating environment of these vehicles.

Small electric vehicles are primarily intended for urban use, precisely where interactions with pedestrians and cyclists are most frequent and where the risk of severe injury or death is highest. Safety technologies such as automated emergency braking with pedestrian and cyclist detection are specifically designed to prevent deaths in these environments. Delaying the application of the latest generation of these systems to vehicles that are most likely to operate in dense urban settings would directly undermine the EU’s road safety objectives.

ETSC therefore urges the Cypriot Presidency to reject the creation of a two-tier safety system in which so-called affordable urban vehicles offer reduced protection to people outside the vehicle. Minimum safety requirements must evolve in line with technological progress and proven safety benefits, rather than being frozen to reduce manufacturing costs.

### **Electric vans and exemptions from speed limiters**

The Commission proposal includes an exemption from speed limiter requirements for electric vans in categories N2 and N3 with a maximum permissible mass of up to 4.2 tonnes. ETSC strongly opposes this exemption.

Under existing EU law, vehicles in categories N2 and N3 may only be used on the road if they are equipped with a speed limitation device set so that their speed cannot exceed 90 km/h.

This requirement reflects the higher risks associated with larger and heavier vehicles and has long been a core element of EU road safety policy.

The Commission justifies the proposed exemption on the grounds that electric vans are heavier than their internal combustion engine equivalents due to the additional weight of batteries. As a result, some electric vans with similar payloads and use cases to lighter vehicles below 3.5 tonnes are classified as N2 and therefore fall within the scope of the 90 km/h speed limiter requirement. According to the Commission, this reduces the attractiveness of electric vans for customers, many of whom are small and medium-sized enterprises, and could slow the uptake of electric vans as well as make it harder for manufacturers to meet CO2 performance targets for light commercial vehicles.

ETSC does not accept this reasoning. Safety requirements should be determined by vehicle mass and risk, not by powertrain type. Heavier vehicles pose greater risks in collisions, particularly to other road users, and this risk does not diminish because a vehicle is electric. Exempting electric N2 and N3 vans up to 4.2 tonnes from speed limiters would therefore weaken existing safety standards and introduce an unjustified inconsistency in enforcement.

The safety risks associated with vans are well documented. In 2018 alone, 2,630 people were killed in collisions involving light goods vehicles in the EU, accounting for 11% of all road deaths. Van traffic has continued to grow rapidly, driven by the expansion of home deliveries and just-in-time logistics, often under significant time pressure. These conditions increase the likelihood of speeding, not reduce it.

ETSC's position is clear and consistent. As a general policy principle, ETSC has long called for all N1 vans to be fitted with a top speed limiter set at 130 km/h. At the same time, ETSC strongly supports maintaining the existing 90 km/h speed limiter for all N2 and N3 vehicles, regardless of whether they are powered by electricity or fossil fuels. Electrification must not be used as a justification to dilute established safety protections.

# Megatrucks and Road Safety: Risks in the EU Weights and Dimensions Review

ETSC strongly opposes the European Commission’s proposal to lift restrictions on the cross-border transport of European Modular Systems (EMS), commonly referred to as “gigaliners” or “megatrucks.” These vehicle combinations are significantly larger than standard lorries in Europe – measuring up to 25.25 metres in length (nearly 9 metres longer than standard trucks) and weighing up to 60 tonnes. To put this into perspective, an EMS is as long as six passenger cars and weighs as much as a fully loaded Boeing 737-300. In Finland, even more extreme configurations – up to 34.5 metres and 76 tonnes – are permitted.

ETSC has serious concerns about the safety implications of wider EMS use. Until now, these vehicles have only been permitted under strict conditions in a small number of EU Member States. However, the broader safety, infrastructure, and environmental impacts of cross-border EMS operations have not been fully assessed.<sup>15</sup>

Alarming, the Commission’s proposal contains no clear legal safeguards limiting EMS vehicles to specific parts of the road network. Even more concerning is a requirement for Member States to ensure that EMS-approved road networks are connected across national borders. Roads near borders may be ill-equipped to handle the additional risks posed by EMS traffic.

The proposal also fails to set EU-wide minimum training requirements for drivers of EMS vehicles. As it stands, in several Member States, 18-year-olds could be permitted to drive these significantly longer and heavier trucks without any additional qualifications beyond those required for standard lorries – a clear gap in safety regulation.

A 2024 study<sup>16</sup> also shows that the expansion of longer and heavier road freight transport will have substantial negative effects on the rail freight sector, which has a much better safety record.

In March 2024, the European Parliament narrowly approved new provisions to expand the use of megatrucks. An amendment to remove these provisions came just six votes short of passing – revealing deep divisions among MEPs. This close vote is significant because it highlights the widespread concerns about the safety, environmental, and modal shift implications of allowing longer and heavier trucks on EU roads. Despite the outcome, nearly

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<sup>15</sup> ETSC Press Release (2024) European Parliament Backs Mega-Trucks Big Lorries, Big Mistake <https://tinyurl.com/26nyciuz>

<sup>16</sup> CER Reports (2024) Study on Weights and Dimensions <https://tinyurl.com/3fkx8en4>

half of the Parliament opposed the changes – indicating that the debate is far from settled.<sup>17</sup>

Despite similar concerns being raised by several Member States in recent Transport Council meetings, the Council has now adopted its general approach on the proposal. ETSC is deeply concerned that the Council's position weakens the text from a road safety perspective, compared both with the European Parliament's position and the European Commission's original proposal.<sup>18</sup> Several of the important safeguards have been diluted, increasing the risk that European Modular Systems could be enabled in practice without sufficient limits, infrastructure conditions or enforcement.

ETSC therefore calls on the Cypriot Presidency, in the context of the upcoming trilogue negotiations, to bring road safety back to the centre of the discussions and to ensure that any provisions related to EMS remain strictly limited, conditional and robustly safeguarded.

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<sup>17</sup> ETSC Press Release (2024) European Parliament Backs Mega-Trucks Big Lorries, Big Mistakes <https://tinyurl.com/26nycjuz>

<sup>18</sup> ETSC Press Release (2025) EU Member States cut back on vital vehicle checks and open door to “monster trucks” in double blow to EU road safety <https://tinyurl.com/yx2ydyrs>

## Closing the Loophole: Reforming Individual Vehicle Approvals (IVA)

In recent years, there has been a sharp increase in imports of large American pick-up trucks such as the Dodge Ram, Ford F-150, and Ford Raptor. These vehicles are typically brought into the EU by private individuals or specialist dealers and are approved for road use through the Individual Vehicle Approval (IVA) process.

However, unlike vehicles that undergo EU type-approval, individually approved vehicles are subject to significantly lower safety and environmental standards. They are exempt from the requirements of the General Safety Regulation and are not included in CO<sub>2</sub> monitoring or target compliance - creating a clear competitive disadvantage for manufacturers that meet EU regulations.

These large pick-up trucks and SUVs are ill-suited to the European road environment. There is no practical justification for allowing their import, especially when a wide range of EU type-approved commercial vehicles is available to meet all use cases.<sup>19</sup>

A major concern is that there is currently no upper limit on the number of vehicles that can be approved under the IVA scheme - a significant loophole in Regulation (EU) 2018/858. In contrast, EU manufacturers producing in small volumes have access to a simplified Small Series Type Approval procedure, capped at 1,500 vehicles annually. Beyond that threshold, full type-approval is required.

The lack of a cap under the IVA system has led to its misuse. Thousands of mass-produced vehicles are being imported into the EU while bypassing the safety and environmental standards set out in type-approval legislation. For example, the RAM has annual sales exceeding 500,000 units in the US alone - far beyond what could be considered a niche or specialist vehicle.

The European Commission's DG GROW is now preparing an update to the IVA requirements, aiming to align them more closely with current EU safety and environmental rules. Under the proposed changes:

- Exemptions would be limited to narrow, clearly justified cases (e.g. vehicles adapted for persons with disabilities or for use as ambulances).

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<sup>19</sup> Joint letter by Civil Society (October 2023), <https://tinyurl.com/3v9smr8t>. Joint letter (July 2024), Individual Vehicle Approval, and the continued application of the lightest touch to the most lethal vehicles, <https://tinyurl.com/y3pc7wpa>

-Vehicles produced in large series (global annual production >1,500 units) would be required to comply with most provisions of the General Safety Regulation and EU environmental standards.

ETSC urges the Cypriot Presidency to fully support the Commission's efforts to close the IVA loophole. Member States should also be strongly encouraged to align their national IVA schemes with the revised EU framework to ensure consistent enforcement across the single market.

There must be a single, high standard for all vehicles used on Europe's roads - without loopholes or backdoors for unsafe and non-compliant imports.

## Trade Agreements Must Not Undermine EU Vehicle Safety Standards

The EU is currently engaged in high-stakes trade negotiations with the United States, with the automotive sector a key area of focus. In light of this, ETSC - together with a coalition of road safety, consumer, and environmental organisations - wrote to Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in March 2025 to express strong opposition to the possibility of recognising US vehicle safety and environmental standards as equivalent to those of the EU.<sup>20</sup>

The concern is clear: US vehicle standards are not equivalent to EU requirements.<sup>21</sup> Critical differences include the lack of mandatory pedestrian protection measures in the US, weaker automation safety oversight, and the absence of many key technologies that are now standard in all new EU vehicles - such as automated emergency braking and emergency lane keeping. Granting equivalence would not only jeopardise road safety in Europe, but also undermine the integrity of the EU single market and create unfair competition for manufacturers that meet higher safety and environmental standards.

The European Commission's response, delivered by Deputy Director-General Leopoldo Rubinacci on behalf of President von der Leyen, offered important reassurances. The Commission stated unequivocally that EU safety and environmental standards are not up for negotiation. While it confirmed that discussions could include administrative streamlining (such as partial recognition of test results where standards align), it emphasised that regulatory substance would remain intact.

Despite these assurances, ETSC and its partners remain concerned. The potential for regulatory dialogue and administrative easing - particularly under pressure to resolve the current transatlantic trade tensions - carries risks. A shift in focus toward reducing so-called "non-tariff barriers" may open the door to gradual erosion of EU protections, especially in areas where US standards fall significantly short.

ETSC calls on the Cypriot Presidency to ensure that road safety is treated as a non-negotiable pillar in any trade negotiations. There must be no compromise on the EU's high vehicle safety standards and no backdoor recognition of weaker systems. The safety of European road users must not be sacrificed for trade concessions.

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<sup>20</sup><https://tinyurl.com/axyhhve9>

<sup>21</sup><https://tinyurl.com/2s3ej2rf>



# Assisted and Automated Driving

## **Filling the safety governance gap in automated driving - the need for an EU agency**

ETSC urges the Cypriot Presidency to accelerate progress on the creation of a dedicated EU agency for the safety of automated driving - an initiative explored in the European Commission's Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy.<sup>22</sup> While the Commission is currently assessing this prospect, the publication of its findings is long overdue. ETSC, alongside six major European civil society organisations, has sent a joint letter to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, urging the establishment of a dedicated EU Road Safety Agency.<sup>23</sup> The upcoming mid-term evaluation of the EU Road Safety Strategy presents an ideal opportunity to release the report and move this important initiative forward.

ETSC believes the new agency should play a central role in ensuring the safe deployment of automated mobility across Europe. One of its core responsibilities should be the type-approval and market surveillance of automated vehicles, ensuring that these technologies meet robust safety standards before and after entering the market.

In addition, the agency should be tasked with collecting data on, and conducting or overseeing, investigations into collisions, incidents, and near-misses involving automated vehicles—including those where advanced driver assistance systems were active. The results of such investigations must be made publicly available to inform evidence-based updates to EU and UNECE regulations. Learning from real-world incidents is essential to building public trust and improving the safety of increasingly automated transport systems.

## **Driver assistance is not automation - rules must reflect that**

The current international regulations for driver assistance systems are undergoing revision at UNECE's World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations (WP.29). These new standards apply in the European Union and other markets such as the UK and Japan. For ETSC it is critical that these updates address well-documented human factor issues such as driver overestimation of system capabilities, misunderstanding of system limits, and increased engagement in non-driving activities when assistance systems are active.

In early 2024, a new UN Regulation on Driver Controlled Assistance Systems (DCAS) was adopted, representing a welcome step forward in addressing some of these human factor

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<sup>22</sup> [https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-themes/mobility-strategy\\_en](https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-themes/mobility-strategy_en)

<sup>23</sup> ETSC Letter to President Von der Leyen European Commission on establishing a Road Safety Agency (2025) <https://tinyurl.com/bdfa9ew2>

concerns. For example, it strengthens driver monitoring requirements. However, a recent update to the regulation has introduced problematic elements: it now permits drivers to take their hands off the steering wheel on motorways as a comfort feature, and allows the system to initiate and perform certain manoeuvres - such as lane changes - without the driver initiating or confirming them, provided the vehicle is on a motorway and the driver has their hands on the wheel.

Crucially, despite these increasing levels of automation, the driver remains fully responsible for the driving task under current legal frameworks. This creates a dangerous mismatch: the system is controlling more aspects of the vehicle's behaviour, yet the driver is expected to remain vigilant and ready to take over, even though humans are poorly suited to passive monitoring over long periods.

This update reflects a compromise between the voices pushing for expanded DCAS functionalities and those, such as ETSC and some Member States, urging caution due to unresolved safety concerns. ETSC remains seriously concerned about this direction.

Even more troubling are ongoing discussions that go further - considering the extension of hands-off, system-initiated manoeuvres to motorways, and enabling hands-on system-initiated manoeuvres in urban areas. These developments risk amplifying existing human factor issues and further blurring the line between assisted and automated driving. From a driver's perspective, systems that require no driver input for manoeuvres and allow hands-off driving may be indistinguishable from automated driving systems - creating confusion about who is truly in control and responsible.

Placing full legal responsibility on the driver in such situations is not only unfair, but also unsafe. The driver would be expected to monitor and supervise a highly complex system without training and these changes are being suggested despite the ample research showing that humans are not good at supervising automated tasks reliably over extended periods.

ETSC calls on regulators to delay any relaxation of current restrictions - particularly those related to hands-off driving and system-initiated manoeuvres - until real-world safety data become available. It is essential to first evaluate whether the assumed human factor improvements built into the current DCAS regulation, such as enhanced driver monitoring, actually lead to safe system use in practice.

This evaluation should be based on in-service monitoring and reporting, as required by the DCAS regulation. Once vehicles equipped with these systems are on the market, manufacturers will be required to report performance data to authorities - data which must be used to inform further regulatory decisions.

ETSC urges the Cypriot Presidency to take a strong stance:

- Hands-off assistance systems should not be allowed outside motorways.
- System-initiated comfort features - such as system-initiated lane changes - should not be permitted during hands-off driving on motorways or hands-on driving in urban areas.

These steps are vital to avoid undermining road safety and to preserve a clear legal and functional distinction between assisted and automated driving.

## Mandating ABS on all Motorcycles

Nearly 3,500 motorcyclists are killed on European roads every year<sup>24</sup> and motorcycle user deaths are declining significantly more slowly than other road deaths.<sup>25</sup> This underlines the urgent need for more measures that improve the safety of motorcycle users to be implemented, including improvements to vehicle safety standards.

Anti-lock braking systems (ABS) on motorcycles have been investigated empirically and, on average, were found to reduce collision involvement by about 30%.<sup>26</sup> Regulation (EU) 168/2013 on the approval of L-category vehicles mandates ABS only for the L3e-A2 and L3e-A3 categories of motorcycles, but not for the L3e-A1 category. That regulation also requires the European Commission to examine the mandatory fitting of an ABS for the L3e-A1 category of motorcycles and to consider presenting a legislative proposal.

The study commissioned to examine extending mandatory fitment to the L3e-A1 category recommended that, given the relatively low cost (predicted at 60.7 million EUR), and the potentially significant associated benefits, (predicted to be 1.4 billion EUR; a benefit to cost ratio of 22.79), ABS should be made mandatory for all new motorcycles.

That study was published in 2020 and the follow-up legislative action by the European Commission to mandate ABS for the L3e-A1 category is therefore long overdue. Meanwhile, Europe is about to fall behind India and ASEAN on this key lifesaving technology, as India is moving forward with mandating ABS on all powered two-wheelers above 50cc, as from 2026.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, Singapore took a similar step by making ABS mandatory on all motorcycles from 2027 onwards.<sup>28</sup>

ETSC urges the Cypriot Presidency to call on the European Commission to come forward with a targeted legislative proposal amending Regulation (EU) 168/2013 to mandate only ABS for motorcycles of category L3e-A1 in early 2026, and subsequently ensure a swift adoption of such proposal.

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<sup>24</sup> European Commission. (2025). Road Traffic Fatalities in the EU in 2023. Collision Matrix. <https://tinyurl.com/5dzwuayd>

<sup>25</sup> The reduction of motorcycle user deaths between 2011 and 2021 was ~20%, compared to ~45% for moped user road deaths and ~33% for other road deaths. Source: ETSC. (2023). PIN Flash Report 44. Reducing road deaths among powered two wheeler users. <https://tinyurl.com/3wb95c3y>

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Times of India. Transport ministry approves mandatory ABS in all 2-wheelers, 2 helmets with new bikes. Reported on 18 June 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/5n6tn6mk>

<sup>28</sup> Land Transport Authority Singapore. All new motorcycles registered from 1 April 2027 to Have Anti-Lock Braking System. 16 September 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/59djkexm>

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