

Our position

US industry perspective on the EU Driving Licences Directive



AmCham EU speaks for American companies committed to Europe on trade, investment and competitiveness issues. It aims to ensure a growth-orientated business and investment climate in Europe. AmCham EU facilitates the resolution of transatlantic issues that impact business and plays a role in creating better understanding of EU and US positions on business matters. Aggregate US investment in Europe totalled more than €3.7 trillion in 2022, directly supports more than 4.9 million jobs in Europe, and generates billions of euros annually in income, trade and research and development.

Executive summary

The European Commission has proposed a Road Safety Package to modernise driving licence rules and improve road safety. The following summary highlights the importance of harmonising across the EU three key provisions from the legislative package.

Firstly, the increase in the maximum permitted mass of a B category driving licence from 3.5 tonnes to 4.25 tonnes for alternatively fuelled vehicles would align perfectly with the EU's environmental goals. This harmonisation would also alleviate labour shortages in the industry and provide business certainty for manufacturers and transport operators investing in sustainable transport.

Secondly, the package introduces both the zero-tolerance rule for drink-driving and the possibility to pass the driver licence's test and begin driving cars and lorries accompanied from the age of 17 to gain driving experience. If implemented throughout the EU, these measures would contribute to improved road safety.

Thirdly, the digitalisation of driving licences, including the use of online procedures, is welcome. The possibility for third-country nationals to exchange their driving licence for an EU one based on comparable road safety standards is also a positive step. Increased digitalisation would benefit the road freight industry and other sectors operating across multiple EU Member States.

Introduction

On 1 March 2023, the European Commission tabled its Road Safety Package, which aims to modernise driving licence rules, including the introduction of a digital driving licence valid throughout the EU, and new provisions to facilitate the enforcement of traffic rules across borders. The proposed rules seek to improve safety for all road users and help the EU achieve its Vision Zero of having no deaths on EU roads by 2050.

The US business community welcomes these proposed provisions as an opportunity to align with these goals and improve the directive. When amending the Commission's proposals, policymakers should ensure key provision are implemented uniformly across the EU to ensure that the Road Safety Package enhances existing legislation in line with the bloc's environmental, social and digital objectives in road transport.

Modernising driving licence rules in vehicle weights for B Licences and alternatively fuelled vehicles

The proposed EU-wide increase in maximum vehicle weights for B licences for alternatively fuelled vehicles is a positive development. Currently, a derogation allows holders of a B license to drive alternatively fuelled vehicles up to 4.25 tonnes, considering the weight of the propulsion system. However, Member States are not required to enforce this rule uniformly. As a result, only about half of the EU Member States have implemented it, creating a fragmented policy landscape. This could hinder the adoption of zero-emission vehicles and undermine the Single Market.

An EU-wide implementation would promote harmonisation, align with the EU's environmental goals and also alleviate the industry's current labour shortage. With driver shortages becoming increasingly urgent, it is crucial to make the driving profession more accessible and appealing throughout the EU.

Failing to do so could lead to a shortage of over two million drivers in Europe by 2026, significantly impacting both freight transportation and millions of passenger trips.

It would also send an important signal to manufacturers and transport operators that are investing heavily in sustainable transport but lack business certainty to produce and operate these alternatively fuelled vehicles up to 4.25 tonnes across the EU. These regulations should be implemented at an EU-wide level, especially so they align with other EU policies, such as the CO₂ emission standards for cars and vans.

Enhancing road safety: proposed measures for novice drivers and young driver access

The proposed zero-tolerance rule on drink-driving, could have a positive effect on road safety. Allowing young people to take their test and begin accompanied driving of cars and lorries from the age of 17 to gain driving experience would foster a safer road environment. Additionally, this approach addresses the shortage of professional drivers and enhances access to the profession for young drivers. This is particularly important at a time when the industry is struggling to attract a new generation of professionals.

Advancing driving licence digitalisation

Finally, the proposed digitalisation of the driving licence, including the option to utilise online procedures, is a positive development that would facilitate the replacement, renewal or exchange of driving licences. The provision allowing third-country nationals to exchange their driving licence for an EU licence if their home country maintains comparable road safety standards is also commendable.

The increased digitalisation is expected to benefit the road freight industry and the sectors it serves because these companies often operate across multiple EU Member States. Furthermore, the road freight sector would appreciate the digitisation of relevant freight documents in addition to the driving licence, as it would be advantageous for both operators and control agencies.

Conclusion

The European Commission's Road Safety Package would enhance driving licence rules, promote harmonisation and align with environmental goals. Implementing an EU-wide increase in maximum vehicle weights for alternatively fuelled vehicles would address the industry's labour shortage and support the adoption of zero-emission vehicles. The proposed measures for novice drivers and digitalisation of driving licences would contribute to road safety and operational efficiency. Implementing these improvements across the entire EU would bring the bloc closer to achieving Vision Zero and create a safer road environment.