

Our position

US industry perspective on the revision of the Weights and Dimensions 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's proposed revision of the Weights and Dimensions Directive is a positive step towards enhancing road transport efficiency and reducing emissions in the EU. The directive sets maximum dimensions for heavy-duty vehicles (HDVs) and seeks to align them with emissions reduction goals, promote zero-emission technologies, streamline intermodal operations and improve enforcement.

US industry supports initiatives that further strengthen the EU internal market for road transport and increase the sector's efficiency, including the revision's proposal to harmonise the maximum authorised weight for HDVs to 44 tonnes across the EU. The proposal would also facilitate cross-border innovation such as the European Modular Concept and high-capacity vehicles (longer and heavier HDVs). Additionally, it would help reduce the imminent threat of driver shortages in the EU.

To improve the proposal, the Commission should remove all references to the end of internal combustion engine (ICE) technology and maintain a technology-neutral approach. In addition, the revision should allow for the proposed trials involving longer and heavier vehicles to be extended beyond five years.

Introduction

The Council Directive 96/53/EC on Weights and Dimensions outlines the maximum permissible length, width and height for HDVs operating on EU roads. On 11 July 2023, the European Commission introduced a proposal to amend this directive to align it with targets to reduce greenhouse emissions from transport. The proposed changes aim to eliminate regulatory and technical obstacles, promote the adoption of zero-emission technologies and energy-efficient devices in the HDV sector, streamline intermodal operations, provide clarity on the use of longer and heavier vehicles in cross-border operations and enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of enforcement.

The European Commission's proposal would increase the maximum authorised weight of HDVs from 40 to 44 tonnes in cross-border operations, further facilitate the use of longer and heavier HDVs – such as the European Modular Concept and high-capacity vehicles in general between EU Member States that already allow these vehicles domestically – and support cross-border trialling of these more efficient HDV combinations.

Below, US businesses present a number of suggestions to further improve the text to generate long-lasting efficiency gains for the transportation sector and its customers and thereby contribute to the EU's climate ambitions.

Longer/heavier HDVs trigger higher efficiency and improved environmental performance

The proposal to establish an EU-wide maximum permissible weight of 44 tonnes for HDVs, as opposed to the current 40 tonnes, is a positive and overdue step. This modest weight increase has the potential to help transport companies better use their available cargo space in HDVs, leading to increased operational efficiency and consequently, improved environmental performance.

Equally, facilitating the cross-border use of the European Modular Concept (longer and heavier vehicle combinations, two of which can transport the volume of three regular HDVs) and high-capacity vehicles in general between consenting EU Member States would lead to more efficient and thus sustainable road transport.

However, the Commission should eliminate all references to the end of ICE technology in the revised directive because this legislation is not the right vehicle to regulate technologies. Moreover, while zero-emission HDVs play a crucial role in helping the transport sector align with the EU's climate objectives, it is important to support ICE HDVs as long as zero-emission technologies in these vehicles remain insufficiently available and economically unviable for many. This approach should ensure that there is operational continuity and legal certainty for transport operators investing in innovative concepts such as EMS and HDVs.

Increasing the maximum permissible weight of HDVs to 44 tonnes for international transport and facilitating cross-border EMS/HCVs would help the EU cope with increased transport flows and driver shortages while preventing increased emissions from having more vehicles on the road.

Mutual recognition needed

In order to support seamless cross-border movements, policymakers must incorporate language in the text for EU Member States to mutually recognise each other's driver qualification and training certificates applicable to drivers of EMS/HDVs.

Extending the trial periods for longer, heavier vehicles

The European Commission's proposal for cross-border trials with EMS/HCVs is a promising avenue for EU Member States to learn more about the benefits of these vehicles.

Nevertheless, instead of restricting these trials to a fixed, rigid, non-extendable five-year time frame, Member States must have the flexibility to extend the trials when deemed suitable

Conclusion

The European Commission's proposed revision of the Weights and Dimensions Directive is a welcome step to increase road transport efficiency and further decarbonise of road transport sector.

By considering and acting upon the above points, EU policymakers can shape a more effective and forward-thinking framework to meet the EU transportation sector's evolving needs, while also meeting its climate goals.