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Ad Hoc Multidisciplinary Group of Experts
on Safety in Tunnels, (Sixth session,
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The Commission's role in improving safety in road tunnels (dated 27 June 2002)

Transmitted by the European Commission

The fatal accidents in 1999 in the Mont-Blanc Tunnel on 24th March 1999 (France/Italy), the Tauern Tunnel (Austria) on 27th May 1999 and the Gotthard tunnel on 24th October 2001 caused the death of 62 people. Those accidents raised the awareness of the responsible authorities at local, national and European levels confronted with the increasing traffic frequency in the sensitive region of the Alps.

As the Commission is concerned, in its recent White Paper of 12 September 2001: "European transport policy for 2010: time to decide, COM(2001)370", it announced that it would prepare a proposal for a European Directive on the harmonisation of minimum safety standards to offer a high level of safety for the users of tunnels.

The proposal will take into account the following elements:

- ?? The proposal should apply to all long road tunnels located on the Trans-European Network.
- ?? The respective roles and responsibilities at different levels (national authorities, inspection bodies, tunnel managers and emergency services) shall be clarified.
- ?? The level of protection offered by a tunnel depends on several technical and operational aspects which shall all be covered: technical equipment (ventilation and fumes-extraction devices, shelters, escape galleries...), traffic rules (traffic restriction, distance between vehicles...), training of the operating staff to cope with a major accident, rescue

organization, lastly information to users on how to react in the event of a fire and communication means to facilitate the users' evacuation in the event of a fire.

The proposal should be published in the third quarter of 2002. It will then be examined by the European Parliament and the Council, which will have the responsibility for its adoption. In addition, the European Commission has taken a series of other tunnel safety-related actions:

- ?? Assessment of the current situation regarding the investigation on the recent tunnel accidents and the latest developments concerning tunnel security measures;
- ?? Joint activities with PIARC (the World Road Association) and OECD with a view to develop an objective and scientific methodology to evaluate road alternatives for the transport of hazardous goods in tunnels;
- ?? Support for awareness and capacity building on tunnel safety, with the production of a leaflet and of 2 videos on "Safety and safe driving in road tunnels";
- ?? Support for several activities in the field of research and technological development through the 5th Framework Research Programme;
- ?? Subsidies granted to safety improvement measures in several road tunnels (notably for the refurbishment of the Mont-Blanc tunnel) through the Trans-European Network Budget.

The measures at national and European level aim at directly addressing the urgent needs to improve safety in road tunnels. Moreover, the recent fires in tunnels finally raise the question of the sustainability of transport, notably in sensitive areas. In this respect, the absolute priority for the medium to long term will be to build and put in operation as soon as possible new railway lines, which will carry a share of goods transported by lorries. The description of a coherent approach to the development of rail freight transport is one of the major priorities of the White Paper on Transport Policy, which will contribute greatly to reducing accident risks in tunnels.
