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## **European passenger car tolls: Promoting mobility and opening up Europe's roads**

In most European countries, tolls on passenger cars are accepted as a key pillar in funding the development of infrastructure. Yet with very different toll systems applied across Europe, it is sometimes hard to find one's way through this 'toll jungle'. Not only do the type of tolls vary from charges calculated by distance travelled to a single flat-rate fee in the form of a vignette (a sticker displayed on the windscreen), a special fee for using a bridge or tunnel, or a congestion charge for inner cities, but the vehicle categories for the toll rate are differently defined in different countries.

For car drivers, these many different toll systems represent "a burden [...] and an obstacle to their mobility" (EU Commissioner for Transport, Violeta Bulc, 01/2015)<sup>1</sup> which stands in the way of unhampered cross-border passenger car traffic in Europe.

For this reason, the association of European Automobile Clubs (EAC) expressly welcomes the European Commission's initiative to introduce standardised pan-European criteria for passenger car tolls in the medium term. A common European toll system for passenger cars can promote mobility between the Member States and create the basis for the effective use and transparent funding of our infrastructure.

Any common European car toll system, though, applying a user financing model must be built on the fundamental 'user pays principle'. For example, since trucks burden the infrastructure 60,000 times more than cars, they must be asked to pay significantly more towards funding transport routes. From this perspective, passenger car tolls cannot be introduced if truck tolls are simultaneous reduced.

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<sup>1</sup>Schiltz, Christoph B.: "Die Euro Maut droht", Welt am Sonntag, Nr. 4, 25.01.2015, p. 7.

In principle, the following applies:

- 1. The decision on the national mix to support infrastructure funding must remain the remit of each individual Member State – car road tolls cannot be introduced as a compulsory measure. Where car tolls are applied, they have to be aligned with standard European criteria and, among other things, meet the requirements of the user pays principle to exclude burdening passenger traffic to relieve freight traffic.**

The criteria for a standardised European toll system have to be designed, in principle, to ensure the maximum ease of implementation, transparency of revenues and data security. Given over 750 million passenger cars in Europe, the security aspect is especially important. Access to the anticipated substantial volume of (vehicle) data will be highly prized and raises the question of whether the sustainable security of vehicle information can be guaranteed with the size of data capture required by an electronic toll system. Toll data, though, must not be allowed to function as a gateway to the misuse of vehicle and mobility data. Therefore, the EAC is calling for a vignette system as a solution proven as a simple, cost-effective and data protection-friendly alternative.

Applied to motorways and major roads and designed as a progressive toll fee with graduated tariffs, the vignette solution not only eases the burden on those drivers rarely using their vehicles or primarily making local journeys, but also on commuters or those in rural areas dependent on their cars for daily transport. Here, the user pays principle is clearly applied in a two-pillar financing structure combining revenues from excise duties on mineral oils<sup>2</sup> with the toll vignette as an instrument of basic financing. Under such a system, those driving the longest distances and paying the corresponding higher toll rate contribute a higher proportional amount towards funding road infrastructure.

- 2. The vignette is not only cost-effective and flexible, but its intrinsic data economy makes it preferable to an electronic toll system – though in any case measures are needed to ensure the security of vehicle data.**

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<sup>2</sup> Minimum rates of excise duties on mineral oils are set at Community level, see Council Directive 2003/96/EC.

A pan-European standardised toll system for passenger cars has to satisfy, not least, the standard of transparency needed to effectively earmark the funds raised by such toll fees. The driver paying a toll must be certain that this amount is systematically ploughed back into infrastructure development on a permanent basis, and the revenues are not diminished or reduced by extraneous utilisation or some other outflow of funds.

**3. Where a Member State opts to introduce a car toll based on standardised criteria, the revenues generated must flow back to that Member State and be earmarked as a binding investment in the transport infrastructure.**

The optimal use of funds here can only be achieved if revenues are available for accounting periods exceeding one year and, in the ideal case, are not integrated into the national budget.

### Conclusion

Standardised pan-European criteria for introducing passenger car tolls are long overdue. Since such criteria will ensure more transparent and smoother car traffic between Member States, they will also make the flow of traffic more cost-effective and environmentally friendly. Here, statutory provisions are needed not merely to define a cogent framework for Member States, but also leave the space on the national level to decide on the key question of whether or not to introduce a toll.

In contrast, the data gathering process itself must meet clearly defined standards, with user-friendliness and security at the heart of any toll system. For this reason, the association of European Automobile Clubs (EAC) is calling for a pan-European solution with a standardised vignette (sticker) system with earmarked revenues. Given its minimal data protection issues, the vignette is easily implemented and offers a cost-effective approach to promoting cross-border mobility in European passenger car traffic.