



Department for Transport

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Dear Ms Griffin

Thank you for your letter of 18 January addressed to the Secretary of State, enclosing a Regulation 28 Report on the investigation into the death of Mrs Norah Mary Fairhurst. The circumstances of this accident are that Mrs Fairhurst had crossed the road in such a manner that she would not have been visible to the lorry driver.

On conclusion of the inquest you made a finding that future deaths could occur if pedestrians and cyclists are located directly in front of a large goods vehicle which is exempt from the requirement to have a Class VI mirror. You have requested that a review be carried out on the regulations to consider the retro-fitting of a Class VI mirror to currently exempt vehicles.

I am replying as Head of the International Vehicle Standards Division of the Department for Transport (DfT) as this division has responsibility for road vehicle safety standards.

Directive 2003/97/EC relates to the fitting of indirect vision devices, including the Class VI mirror to heavy goods vehicles for new types of vehicle with effect from 26 January 2006. The directive postponed the fitting of the Class VI mirror for a further year (26 January 2007). In line with common practice, manufacturers applied for a derogation for existing types of new vehicles for a further year to enable them to sell existing stocks of vehicles that had already been manufactured, and up to 4,500 vehicles may have been in this category. I trust this explains why we applied the exemption until 26 January 2008 if a Class VI mirror was not fitted.

I would like to assure you that the Department takes the safety of all road users very seriously and my team is active in the area of improving vision for drivers, both direct and indirect. Last year we carried out preliminary work on retrofitting a Class VI mirror to currently exempt vehicles from January 2000 onwards. Although there are a number of collisions involving vulnerable road users and goods vehicles each year, the benefit of a Class VI mirror is limited to circumstances where the vehicle is stationary and about to move off. This is reflected in casualty statistics which show little difference for such collisions involving pre and post 2007 vehicles.

Consideration has been given to developing other solutions to provide protection for a wide range of vulnerable road users, and efforts have focussed on ways of providing enhanced vision for drivers.

Agreement has recently been reached at international level to permit the replacement of all mirrors by camera systems. These will in future be available on an optional basis so that operators can choose a vehicle specification that is most appropriate for the nature of their operation. Cameras can already be fitted in addition to mirrors.

Further work is ongoing in the EU to enable heavy goods vehicles to be more aerodynamic and provide improved safety for vulnerable road users. Engineers from my team are fully engaged in this work which will lead to the development of enhanced type approval standards for new vehicles, allowing operators to have safer vehicles without the need to compromise on load carrying capacity.

The Department is also working with the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT), Transport for London (TfL) and other stakeholders on HGV safety. This activity includes the development and promotion of safer lorry designs. The work is informed by research which has been carried out for DfT and TfL. Manufacturers are being encouraged to develop new vehicle designs that offer better direct vision, and some improved vehicle designs are currently undergoing trials with operators in London. A number of aftermarket devices to detect vulnerable road users have been assessed to develop a method for ranking these devices, and key stakeholders from the operating industry are involved in all of this work.

I am grateful to you for raising this incident with me, and wish to assure you that improving direct and indirect vision for drivers is a subject where the Department is taking steps to bring about tangible improvements in safety.

Yours sincerely,



Ian Yarnold
Head; International Vehicle Standards Division