

COTER-007

Brussels, 26 March 2002

OPINION

of the Committee of the Regions

of 13 March 2002

on the

White Paper European Transport Policy

for 2010: time to decide

(COM(2001) 370 final)

The Committee of the Regions,

HAVING REGARD TO the Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on European transport policy for 2010 (COM(2001) 370 final);

HAVING REGARD TO the decision by the Commission on 14 September 2001, under the first paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, to consult the Committee of the Regions on the matter;

HAVING REGARD TO the decision of its Bureau on 12 June 2001 to direct Commission 3 (Trans-European Networks, Transport and Information Society) to draw up the relevant opinion;

HAVING REGARD TO its earlier opinions on “the Trans-European Transport Network: 1998 report on the implementation of the guidelines and priorities for the future” (COM(1998) 614 final) (CdR 60/99 fin);

HAVING REGARD TO its earlier opinions on “the common transport policy: sustainable mobility: perspectives for the future” (COM(1998) 716 final) (CdR 189/99 fin)¹;

HAVING REGARD TO its earlier opinions on “developing the citizens’ network” (COM(1998) 431 final) (CdR 436/1998 fin)²;

HAVING REGARD TO its earlier opinions on “spatial planning in Europe” (CdR 340/96 fin);

HAVING REGARD TO its earlier opinion on “a sustainable transport strategy for local and regional authorities and the European Union” (98/C 180/01);

HAVING REGARD TO its earlier opinion on “the green paper towards fair and efficient pricing in transport” (COM(95) 691 final) (CdR 364/96 fin)³;

HAVING REGARD TO its earlier opinions on “the structure and goals of European regional policy in the context of enlargement and globalisation: opening of the debate” (CdR 157/2000 fin)⁴;

HAVING REGARD TO its earlier opinions on “cohesion and transport” (COM(1998) 806 final) (CdR 390/99 fin);

HAVING REGARD TO its earlier opinions on “a second set of Community measures on maritime safety, following the sinking of the oil tanker Erika” (COM(2000) 802 final - 2000/0325-0326-0327 COD) (CdR 50/2001 fin);

HAVING REGARD TO the draft opinion adopted by Commission 3 on 23 November 2001 (CdR 54/2001 rev. 1) (rapporteur: **Mrs Muriel Barker-UK/PES**);

WHEREAS the role of transport, in terms of both infrastructure and the provision of services, is crucial to the development of all regions;

WHEREAS all the spheres of government – European, national, regional and local – need to collaborate when developing transport policy, but in line with the principle of subsidiarity, local and regional authorities, are the level of government closest to the citizen;

WHEREAS in the future European regional policy will also have to pursue the goals of strengthening economic and social cohesion and promoting the overall harmonious development of the Community;

WHEREAS freight transport is a vital factor in achieving European integration and furthering the economic and social development of the regions;

WHEREAS the Community does not have competence in the area of spatial planning, but the Commission can propose “soft” policies which could have a significantly positive effect for the environment and sustainable development;

WHEREAS local and regional authorities have a vital role in planning and implementing integrated spatial development;

WHEREAS every mode of transport has an impact on the environment and human health, on the cost of providing and maintaining public infrastructure, and to some extent on the safety and travelling times of other transport users;

WHEREAS congestion and pollution in our cities and regions lead to increased costs to businesses and damage the effectiveness of the transport system;

WHEREAS the EU is obliged under Article 3c of the Amsterdam Treaty to integrate environmental protection requirements into the definition and implementation of Community policies with a view to promoting sustainable development;

WHEREAS the Gothenburg European Council placed shifting the balance between modes of

transport at the heart of the EU's sustainable development strategy;

WHEREAS it is generally acknowledged that individual modes of transport do not always pay for their full internal and external costs and this distorts the transport market;

WHEREAS a separate opinion is being prepared on the revisions to the TENS guidelines;

Adopted the following opinion unanimously at its 43rd plenary session of 13 and 14 March 2002 (meeting of 13 March).

The Committee of the Regions

Introduction

1. welcomes the steps being taken by the Commission to establish a European transport policy which will add value to the policy initiatives in Member States, which already share many common elements. A sustainable transport policy must meet the potential problems of rising car usage in the European Union as a whole as well as in the accession countries as Community membership brings higher incomes;
2. generally welcomes the approximately sixty measures proposed for action at Community level but emphasises the need for local and regional authorities to be involved in all stages of the development of European Transport Policy; and seeks an indication of the timetable for their achievement (with set targets being prepared to assist with their delivery);
3. highlights the value of engaging the citizen in the development of potentially controversial policies. It is essential not to create sets of "winners and losers" when introducing radical policies. Policy-making must be transparent and decisions seen as being taken close to the individual citizen. This is a role which local and regional authorities are uniquely able to fulfil;

Sustainability

4. welcomes Marco Polo as the successor to the PACT initiatives, but at the same time points out that, given the importance of intermodal linkage in boosting the use of transport by rail, sea and inland waterway, the resources earmarked for the next two years are considered too low. Promoting greater use of short-sea transport, rail and inland navigation as alternatives to road haulage, will provide an important element of the proposals for modal shift in the communication. It is essential that the more sustainable modes are developed to offer the flexibility, versatility and speed of the dominant road mode. In order to meet the need for a door-to-door service, road transport should be fully integrated into an intermodal chain.. For particularly costly infrastructure projects to permit intermodality, for example rail tunnels, cross-financing measures must be permitted under Community law. The directive on

transport infrastructure costs must make it possible to include external costs - i.e. to reflect the real costs involved - in order to fund infrastructure that provides a more environmentally-friendly alternative. Rules governing state aid should not frustrate the use of public support where it is essential for the introduction of innovative schemes to promote intermodality;

considers, however, that this initiative must not have the effect of marginalising regions unable to benefit from these alternative methods including those island regions which are reliant on roads for the transport of goods;

5. recommends that full use be made of assessment methodologies to evaluate the sustainability of new proposals for development or infrastructure. This will ensure that the objectives of spatial planning policies are not undermined by individual decisions which may appear to have pressing merit; The environmental impacts of transport need special consideration and it will be important to implement effectively the EU Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive;

Modal Shift

6. emphasises that changing the usage of particular modes is intended to contribute to wider objectives of reducing congestion and pollution. In all measures, care should be taken to ensure that the transport sector makes an appropriate contribution to meeting the EU's climate protection commitments. The means and the ends should be clearly distinguished. The CoR observes that progress towards a more sustainable modal balance is to be assessed using an ambitious programme of monitoring across all modes; and this should recognize the varying modal opportunities in different regions;

7. considers that public transport has great value to society and its overall management is first and foremost a public service and it is essential to support sustainable development. Wherever possible, control over the provision of public transport should be overseen by democratically-accountable bodies, either directly or through effective regulatory bodies;

8. welcomes the proposal by the Commission to review the competition law provisions in transport policy, especially when granting state aid. This will help to recognise that many regions have particular transport difficulties, some of which are due to geographical factors, such as regions' remoteness, mountainous terrain or the fact that they are islands;

9. accepts that measures to promote the interests of the travelling public by new contracts for public transport may offer a means of raising standards, but the re-tendering period must be appropriate, given the costs of re-tendering and the inability of short-term contracts to generate the confidence required to make long-term investments in infrastructure;

Urban transport

10. emphasises that many of the most severe impacts of transport arise in urban areas and agrees that excessive use of private cars is one of the main causes of congestion. The development of integrated transport systems involves many actors, but the lead role must be taken by local authorities and regions. The UK system of Local Transport Plans is commended as a holistic approach to local transport, although it is acknowledged that where transport provision is privatised, the commitment of transport firms is ultimately subject to commercial considerations;

11. refers to its previous opinion proposed to the Commission that a benchmarking scheme be established, which would set standards for public transport and other alternatives to the single-user private car such as car-sharing or pooling. Progress on the Citizens' Network Benchmarking

Initiative is welcomed, but the principle should be extended, as recommended by the CoR;

12. emphasises that mobility management should be seen as a positive way of addressing the travel needs of individual citizens as well as contributing to more sustainable travel patterns. It should apply to all new developments and be progressively introduced to established centres of personal movement;

Revitalising the railways

13. endorses the concept of revitalising the railfreight sector, particularly in conjunction with complementary initiatives such as Marco Polo, which will enable railfreight to interface directly with other more sustainable modes such as water-borne transport. Clearly there will be problems in also meeting the capacity requirements of the rail networks if rail passenger services are to achieve their potential for effecting modal shifts. There must be a commitment to upgrading gauging capability so as to permit the handling of the larger freight containers and unaccompanied road trailers;

TENS

14. notes that the TENS guidelines are to be the subject of a separate opinion. The communication includes proposals for additional major TENS projects but the process of defining these priorities should be made fully transparent. In this connection, steps must be taken to prevent continuing delays in implementing the Essen projects; in addition, points of conflict and of interest in the different modes of transport should be made clear and prioritised. These priorities would provide the basis for extending the programme of major TENS projects. The CoR emphasises that good local and regional connections to the long distance links are essential if the full benefit of the TENS are to be achieved. There is a need to address the “missing links” which occur where trans-European traffic meets regional traffic and serious congestion, thus defeating the flow and purpose of the TENS;

15. emphasises that in order to address these problems, regional and local authorities, who are largely responsible for local transport systems, should also be involved in the management of trans-European transport infrastructure. The communication includes a requirement for the most important European routes to be provided with traffic management plans to make better use of existing capacity. As an example of good practice, the UK Highways Agency, which is responsible for trunk roads and motorways, is currently developing *Route Management Strategies* for all its routes. The development of these strategies engages the local and regional authorities through which the routes pass;

urges that the review of the Trans-European Transport Networks take account, in the short and medium term, of the need to ensure balanced development of the EU geographical area. It must therefore be pursued in a manner consistent with the implementation of EU regional policies and European Spatial Development Perspective options;

16. reminds the Commission that in April 2000 it stressed the importance of recognising the difference between the needs of peripheral, landlocked, upland and island regions and those of the heartland regions when designing the TENS networks. This must extend to the infrastructures needed if the European transport network structure is to cover the island regions of the Member States, and if a boost is to be given to the development of intermodal transport tailored to the specific needs of islands. Hopefully these distinctions will be taken into account when the TENS guidelines are reviewed. The CoR also notes that In previous opinions it has called for the TEN-T to include an “inter-regional accessibility map” which would lay down minimum accessibility thresholds which should help to reduce disparities between regions. The CoR considers that the drive for a balance between the central European core and the outlying regions is not sufficiently

clear, given that if the same rates of traffic growth by geographical area are maintained, congestion at the centre will continue to grow, leading to increasing problems for peripheral regions wishing to access the Single Market;

Shipping

17. welcomes the proposal by the Commission to include “motorways of the sea” in a 2004 revision of the TENS guidelines. Many of Europe’s regions have the potential to use short-sea shipping served by rail or inland waterway, to reach other parts of the Single Market and to contribute to the new demands of an expanding Community. As an example, the *NETA* INTERREG project recommends new sea connections between the UK and Poland which would help to relieve the motorways of the Netherlands and Germany of heavy traffic. The definition of “waterways of the sea” must be framed in consultation between the states and the regions. The INTERREG IIIB Operational Programmes can make a major contribution to such a joint reflection;

18. welcomes the emphasis on innovation in shipping services. Regions participating in INTERREG have already carried out extensive research into applications of electronic data exchange to handling the formalities associated with the use of ports. Further developments of these and of “one stop shops” are being proposed under the INTERREG III Programme.

A resolute Community policy is needed to develop transport on all seaboard. The tools proposed in the White Paper – motorways of the sea and proposed review of the regional aid framework in this sector – are not up to the task. The Committee of the Regions awaits more ambitious proposals from the European Commission;

Spatial Planning

19. welcomes the communication’s recognition of the need for measures extending beyond the transport sector. It has previously stated that European regional policy should be based on the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), which provides a valuable policy framework for the development of the EU and recognises the growing importance of regional authorities in spatial planning. It observes that some of the economic factors, such as the dependence of industry on just-in-time logistics, are beyond the direct influence of the regions, but spatial planning capabilities should be used to integrate ever more closely land-use policies and transport policies. This principle should be extended to cover locational decisions for health, education and other policy sectors which have an impact on transport. The ESDP and the emerging Common Transport Policy provide the frameworks needed to bring together sectoral policies which have too often operated independently; the need to integrate land-use and transport policies is essential if the aims of the White Paper are to be fully achieved. Linked to this is the need to ensure that structural fund programmes (e.g. INTERREG, Objectives 1 and 2) directly complement and contribute to the White Paper policies;

20. emphasises that planning regulations can be used to safeguard disused rail lines or waterways for future re-use. There is a particular role for regional authorities to identify potential routes which may cross the boundaries of individual authorities and then ensure that a strategic view is taken to protect the full route from piecemeal development. An exercise under the INTERREG Programme led by authorities in the Netherlands, identified the importance of strategic protection if individual development sites are to be accessible by more sustainable modes such as waterways and rail, which do not have the same network densities as road;

considers that the contribution of transport policies to spatial development requires a change in European legislation on public service obligations. These are of particular importance to the regions and because the White Paper does not give sufficient attention to this issue, a study should be made of the application of PSO’s to intra-community links;

Charging for transport infrastructure

21. considers that where external charges are to be internalised, they must be differentiated depending on time, place and mode. This must be achieved as transparently and simply as possible; the methods used must be clearly understood – extending this understanding to the individual citizen as far as possible;

22. is concerned that since the more peripheral and less accessible areas of the EU inevitably face longer hauls for their imports and exports, charges relating to distance travelled may have a disproportionate impact on local economies. There must be more research into the impact of road pricing on the transport system. The impacts on different areas of the EU must be considered when devising a system for charging across the EU. An additional complicating factor is that regions which may be peripheral many of which have a significant proportion of rural communities, also suffer from congested routes which may be the subject of new charging regimes. From the financial point of view, an additional option to the two measures envisaged in the White Paper, of increasing the maximum contribution to funding and the introduction of a road-use charge, might be proper encouragement of opportunities for private participation in funding public infrastructure, which would also facilitate mixed public-private initiatives and optimise investment complementarity;

Meeting the customer's needs

23. emphasises the key principle of EU policy of putting the citizen at the centre of transport planning. This process must recognise the different decision – making processes in the regions and local authorities of individual Member States. Regional and local authorities are better placed than any other body to listen to grass-roots opinion and engage in a constructive dialogue with the people they represent;

24. considers that the problems of accessibility to public transport must be addressed, primarily by investment in vehicles which are fully accessible to the elderly, passengers with small children, as well as those with disabilities. Limited travel opportunities present barriers to participation in society. This is usefully summarised in the ESDP: *all citizens should have appropriate access to basic services and facilities, open spaces, general and professional education and healthcare;*

25. considers that there are a number of specific threats to health which should be addressed, for example increasing concerns over long-haul flights and the particular problems of ferry services. For our citizens who live in urban areas transport has a number of negative impacts on health and safety and most of these would be addressed by an effective shift towards the use of more sustainable modes. For particularly sensitive areas, special principles should be laid down to ensure the sustainable management of traffic flows while taking account of human health and the environment. The agreement between the EU and Switzerland could serve as a model;

Air transport

26. welcomes the emphasis on developing intermodality between air and rail. However these policies must not marginalise those regions which do not have the benefit of high-speed rail links, especially island regions. When connecting air services from these regions continue to be essential, their slots at hub airports must be protected and not sold off for more profitable long-haul routes, denied to regional services on the basis of aircraft size or lost for new services which may not maintain regional linkages;

27. emphasises the importance of the development of regional airports which could secure better transport choice and more direct links between the regions of Europe. They may take the pressure off major hub airports and direct scheduled services are regarded as an incentive for inward investment. Airports also act as engines for local economic growth but their development must be

carefully planned and managed so that the immediate population enjoy the benefits while minimising the drawbacks of their proximity to the airports. It is the opinion of the Committee that regional airports should not be disadvantaged by proposals for any joint Transatlantic Aviation Agreement;

Safety

28. considers that the communication quantifies the scale of the problems, but appears to offer rather limited measures to address the unacceptable levels of road accidents in the Community, focused only on TENS routes, whereas most accidents occur on local roads. Some Member States have already achieved significant reductions in the numbers killed and seriously injured on their roads. This shows that, with the right measures, road safety programmes can succeed. Campaigns which target specific offences – speeding or drunk driving – will help to change attitudes to car use. Targeted funding of measures which offer demonstrable returns on investment can address safety deficits on the existing network;

29. considers that there are important safety implications in the drive for more sustainable modal balance. Heavy vehicles cause more severe accidents and authorities must enforce the safety-related regulations concerning drivers' hours, driver training, and vehicle standards. However, although higher standards are desirable, the proposals should not be over-prescriptive and impose successive layers of bureaucracy;

The Galileo programme

30. endorses the proposal to establish a European satellite navigation system. The ability to remotely pinpoint transport elements such as public service vehicles or freight containers, and to manage information systems, is already introducing a new dimension to the management of transport. A dedicated satellite array will remove the uncertainties associated with systems which remain subject to military considerations and also increase the precision available to users.

Brussels, 13 March 2002.

The President

The Secretary-General

of the

of the

Committee of the Regions

Committee of the Regions

Albert Bore

Vincenzo Falcone

¹ OJ C 374 of 23.12.1999, p. 76

² OJ C 198 of 14.7.1999, p. 8

³ OJ C 116 of 14.4.1997, p. 52

⁴ OJ C 148 of 18.5.2001, p. 25

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