5.11 Hence, the Commission’s statement that, thanks to greater competition, accomplishing the postal services internal market will unlock job creation potential in the sector to offset job cuts by the traditional operators has yet to be substantiated.

5.12 As far as the sector’s growth potential is concerned, the only option suggested by the proposal is to manage what is apparently seen as irreversible decline in conventional postal services, without placing them in the context of communication needs arising from the Lisbon strategy and the knowledge-based society, and without analysing the impact in terms of energy efficiency.

5.13 The Commission’s proposals envisage regulation essentially as a Member State responsibility, which would ultimately mean 27 national organisations and markets existing alongside one another in the postal services internal market, without Community cohesion. The EESC reiterates its support for a Community postal service with community-wide rules on both competition and universal service provision.

5.14 Given the uncertainties and risks associated with complete liberalisation of the postal market, the EESC cannot agree that there is an urgent need to fix right now a deadline of 1.1.2009, especially in view of the fact that postal operators in Member States which only joined the EU in 2004 would have insufficient time to adapt to the new circumstances.

5.15 The EESC urges that the current Directive be extended, with plans for possible full liberalisation of the postal sector by 1.1.2012, provided that credible options which represent and improvement on the reserved sector have been found by then, in close consultation with all those concerned.


The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Dimitris DIMITRIADIS

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on Transport in urban and metropolitan areas

(2007/C 168/17)

On 19 January 2006, the European Economic and Social Committee, acting in accordance with Rule 29(2) of its Rules of Procedure, decided to draw up an opinion on the above-mentioned proposal.

On 7 November 2006, shortly before completion of work on the Committee's own-initiative opinion, the German presidency requested it to draw up an exploratory opinion on Transport in urban and metropolitan areas.

The EESC Bureau decided that five of the total of twelve issues which had been raised should be dealt with by the TEN section, which for its part felt that it would be useful to incorporate these into ongoing work on The situation of public passenger transport and local rail passenger transport in Europe, especially the new Member States, and to expand the subject accordingly.

The Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 22 March 2007. The rapporteur was Mr Ribbe.

At its 435th plenary session, held on 25 and 26 April 2007 (meeting of 25 April), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 106 votes to 2, with 30 abstentions:

1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1 The EESC is very concerned to note the sharp decline in the share of local public transport (LPT) in total urban transport volume, which is growing fast; this decline is not confined to EU-15 but is also proceeding at an especially rapid pace in the new Member States.

1.2 Traffic flows, from cars in particular, are placing an increasing burden on cities, causing a large number of mostly unresolved problems; concerted action by the Commission, the Member States and local authorities is therefore needed to reverse this trend.

1.3 40% of all traffic-related emissions of greenhouse gases come from Europe. Thus, the repercussions of urban transport policies are felt far beyond city limits.
1.4 The EESC feels that improving the quality of life and environmental protection in cities and achieving climate change and energy efficiency objectives are doubly necessary: in the Committee’s view, top priority for any urban planning or transport policy should be, first, to prevent traffic ‘arising’, or at least to limit it; a second priority should be meeting or enabling the meeting of mobility needs wherever possible through environmental means of transport such as LPT, cycling or walking.

1.5 Cities must remain liveable; car-oriented cities are not an option. Given the scarcity of funding and space, the time when equal support could be given to all forms of transport has gone. The EESC therefore calls on local authorities, national governments and the Commission to ensure that this principle is taken into account in all legislation and support programmes.

1.6 In future, urban and land-use planners in local authorities must curb continued uncontrolled development and functional separation of urban areas, so that, wherever possible, traffic can be prevented. To this end, higher-level regional and land-use planning instruments should also be used, with coordination of housing in cities and surrounding areas enabling prevention of traffic from the outset.

1.7 The Committee also calls for clear prioritisation of objectives, with precedence for LPT, walking and cycling over car infrastructure. This is the only way to improve living and environmental conditions in metropolitan areas.

1.8 The Committee therefore feels that extending the supply of public transport services is a key area in which action should be taken by the Commission, the European Parliament, national governments and local authorities. There are a number of reasons for this, namely: the need to take precautionary measures to safeguard the environment and public health; the need to ensure basic mobility; and the need to provide essential services for all groups in the population, in particular for handicapped persons.

1.9 If further consequences for our quality of life and for the environment are to be avoided then the development of public passenger transport systems must be given higher priority as part of an integrated approach. This is true for everyone and particularly, the estimated 40% of European households which do not have private cars. This realisation and awareness on the part of the European Commission, formulated almost ten years ago in the Communication entitled Developing the citizens’ network (1) have, up to now, regretfully had virtually no influence on actual policy. The EESC is indeed forced to conclude that there are yawing gaps between the many pronouncements in favour of LPT and the translation of these pronouncements into real political action.

1.10 The EESC asks the Commission to submit an appropriate package of political measures setting out clear guidelines and programmes promoting the achievement of the requisite objectives, as part of its planned Green Paper on urban transport. Such a package should also make a reappraisal of the reasons why many of the good measures which were announced in the ‘citizens’ networks’ failed to be implemented.

1.11 The Member States should be aware of their obligation to contribute financially to the social services which they require transport enterprises to provide (such as lower fares for school children, pensioners, persons with disabilities, etc.), and to support local authorities in their investment projects. As discussed in the Thematic strategy on the urban environment, municipalities should draw up transport plans for sustainable urban transport, with a binding objective of a modal shift to environmentally friendly transport (local public transport, cycling, walking), in accordance with minimum European requirements, which have not yet been established. Among other things, these should include quantitative goals for increasing the shares of LPT, walking and cycling in total traffic. If they fail to draw up such plans, they should be barred from receiving support from Community funds.

1.12 Also with a view to meeting EU target values and complying with EU rules on inner-urban air quality and reducing fine-particle and noise pollution, it is essential to give priority to the development of an attractive public transport system incorporating information systems and offers based on new technology (such as mobile phone ticketing, dial-a-bus and dial-a-taxi services) and mobility advisory and marketing services. There is an urgent need for strengthening of the environmental alliance (e.g. bus, train and bike) and for closer synchronisation of timetables.

1.13 The EESC would recommend that the Commission, the Council, and in particular the Committee of the Regions investigate the reasons why some cities have succeeded in progressing towards sustainable urban transport, whereas in others the situation continues to deteriorate. What is clear to the EESC is that this is not just a matter of money, but also to a very large extent of political awareness and of decisions taken in the fields of transport and housing policy. Working on this is at least as important as the compilation and dissemination of best practice, as in the case of the EU’s Civitas Project.

2. Main elements of the opinion and the background to the opinion

2.1 Both within and outside urban areas, the last few years have witnessed a generally strong growth in traffic and often a dramatic change in the modal split, with car journeys constantly on the increase and those by public transport constantly

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declining in relative or absolute terms. This applies to the vast majority of cities and conurbations throughout Europe. In this opinion, local public transport (LPT) refers to bus, tram and rail transport organised or outsourced by the public sector and provided by private, municipal or State companies.

2.2 From the 1950s up to the 1990s, the transport policy strategy pursued by the majority of western European states and many municipalities was geared almost exclusively to the development of the road infrastructure and increased use of motor vehicles, whilst much of the public transport sector had to contend with significant cut-backs. Numerous additional factors such as differing land prices in urban and rural areas, inappropriate land-use and regional planning, tax law, and corporate decisions on siting industrial and commercial premises on the outskirts of cities have resulted in growing volumes of traffic and longer journeys between workplaces, schools, services and leisure facilities.

2.3 The consequences of this are manifold, in both economic and social as well as health and environmental terms: jobs have been lost, those unable to have their own cars or choosing not to be car-owners find it more difficult to get around, in many European cities the disabled are still largely excluded from public transport, and the environmental impact has become intolerable — this includes global climate change, which threatens to have both environmental and economic consequences.

2.4 The situation is particularly apparent in many urban and metropolitan areas, with deteriorating living conditions due to increasingly heavy traffic; local residents complain of noise and air pollution, while large areas have been sacrificed to cars and the accompanying infrastructure, at the expense of quality of life. The EESC would point out that about 80 % of Europeans live in urban areas, and are therefore very much affected. Drivers are also dissatisfied: to take just two common problems, long traffic jams have become part of daily life, and parking places are difficult to find.

2.5 40 % of all transport-related greenhouse gas emissions originate from European cities (1), mainly from cars. During rush hours, when traffic problems in urban areas are at their worst, local public transport is ten times more energy-efficient (and therefore generates fewer emissions) than driving (2). A shift from cars to LPT, cycling and walking could help considerably to relieve pressures. Only if there are more efforts to prevent traffic and to bring about a modal shift from private motor vehicle transport to public transport will Member States and the EU be able to meet their commitments to reduce emissions under the Kyoto Protocol and any future agreements.

2.6 Numerous official papers and scientific studies have been written over the past few years, most of which argue that cities must remain liveable: therefore, important as cars are in modern society, car-oriented cities are neither possible nor desirable. Instead, public transport and environmentally friendly private transport (e.g. cycling or walking) should be the mainstays of modern urban transport planning.

2.7 ‘A well functioning European transport system needs good, sustainable local and regional passenger transport. This contributes to economic development and employment and reduces congestion. It helps to clean up the environment by using less energy, making less noise and producing fewer pollutants. It reduces social exclusion by allowing people without the use of a car to gain access to jobs, schools, shops, medical facilities and leisure activities — recognising that women, the young, the elderly, the unemployed and disabled people are particularly dependent on public transport. Good, sustainable passenger transport is vital in the urban areas.’ These remarks from the Commission’s communication on Developing the Citizens’ Network (3) dating back almost ten years basically sum up everything that needs to be said politically. At the time, the Communication met with the EESC’s approval, and the Committee still stands by the arguments set out in that document; it acknowledges the importance of local public transport and of zero-emission transport modes.

2.8 Hardly any changes have, however, taken place. On the contrary, the car-centred road-building trend, which has lasted for decades, has in many cases since led to the development of physical and economic structures in and outside cities which are, to a maximum degree, geared to or dependent on car transport and which would be hard to change. In view of these entrenched structures — which are now also emerging in the new Member States — and also because of the fact that there is no real political will to initiate structural changes in transport policy (4), there is a challenge, which has up to now remained largely unresolved, as regards halting or even reversing negative transport development trends. The successful reversal of the trend noted in a small number of cities (e.g. Freiburg and Münster in Germany and Delft in the Netherlands) and achieved by means of a clear ‘push and pull’ transport policy does, however, demonstrate that it is possible to bring political influence to bear on developments and to reverse them.

2.9 In its document on ‘citizen’s networks’ (5), the Commission declared its intention to give priority to the development of LPT and local and regional passenger rail transport and even

(1) GD TEN Roadmap 2006/TREN/029.
(2) See UITP: ‘The role of public transport to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve energy efficiency’, March 2006.
(4) Inter alia because of the importance of the motor vehicle industry to the overall economy of the EU.
drew attention to the need to introduce a ‘push and pull’ strategy designed to deliberately displace cars from conurbations and to strongly promote the use of LPT. In the light of current and continuing developments, it must, however, be concluded that the Commission has not been very successful in translating its own demand into action. The EESC deplores the failure of the policy to go much beyond making pronouncements and introducing research projects and pilot schemes.

3. General comments

3.1.1 In comparison with the countries of western Europe, many Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs) enjoy a more favourable situation as regards environmentally compatible and socially acceptable traffic management. The development of the transport sector in the CEECs has, for historical and political reasons, been organised along different lines than in west European countries. For many years, far more passengers travelled by public transport than by car; this applied equally to urban, regional and long-distance transport.

3.1.2 Despite the fact that, following the removal of the ‘Iron Curtain’ in Europe, an extremely sharp trend towards following the western European pattern of development became apparent, a series of environmental indicators linked to land utilisation and transport do, at present, demonstrate that, in comparison to western European countries, the CEECs still remain in a better situation.

3.1.3 Nonetheless, trends in the transport sector of the CEECs are giving rise to concern. The level of car-ownership is constantly increasing, whilst uncontrolled development and suburbanisation, which also have a damaging effect on public transport and the maintenance of existing city centres, are reaching alarming proportions. The EESC feels that action by local authorities, Member States, the European Commission and the European Parliament is urgently needed in order to counter these unwelcome tendencies in the CEECs too.

3.1.4 The transport policy pursued by CEEC governments has focused mainly on the building of new express roads and motorways. In the case of urban transport, it may be noted that most central governments have completely disengaged themselves from LPT, which used to be centrally organised and state-run; they now feel themselves completely exempt from any responsibility. Investment aid of the type granted in Germany, e.g. under the Municipal Transport Financing Law, with funding from the federal budget supporting local authorities in developing public transport and making it more attractive, does not exist in many CEECs. The EESC feels that it would be useful to develop such support systems. In comparison with the situation in EU-15, most CEECs are also lagging far behind in the fields of customer guidance, comfort, information and marketing in respect of public transport; a solution is needed.

3.1.5 The allocation of such limited EU funding for LPT projects as is available from the ERDF and other sources can also create problems. One difficulty is that central governments have their own priorities, which they present in Brussels as part of their operational programmes; these do not necessarily tie in with the priorities set by municipalities. Moreover, the study group has been reliably informed that application procedures for funding are much more difficult and complicated in the case of LPT and regional rail passenger transport than for investment in road infrastructure. In addition, not only are LPT projects fairly limited in number, but there is sometimes competition between, on the one hand, large-scale projects such as the construction of underground railway systems, and, on the other, tram and bus systems, which are significantly cheaper.

3.1.6 The EESC feels that as public funding becomes scarcer, the costs and benefits of public transport options should be weighed up, and funds should be used to ensure that as many as possible attractive transport options are available, with numerous stops, a dense route network and good connections between urban and regional networks. Tram networks are often just as effective as underground railways, but only require 10 % as much investment and have lower maintenance costs. The mistakes of many western European cities such as Nantes in France, which dismantled an excellent tram and trolleybus system and is now spending millions of euros to bring trams back as a solution to traffic problems, must not be repeated in CEECs.

3.1.7 The abovementioned developments in the CEECs are therefore resembling, to an ever increasing extent, the developments in EU-15 which for years have been recognised as being unsustainable and irresponsible.

3.2 Urban transport developments over the last few decades

3.2.1 Over the last few decades, a huge change has taken place in cities, with LPT facing fiercer competition.

— Cars have long ceased to be a luxury; instead, they have become widely available and increasingly comfortable consumer durables; at the same time, the EESC would point out that 40 % of households in the EU do not have a car or do not wish to have one.

— A very influential lobby has developed around cars and accompanying economic sectors.

— Travelling by car is very convenient: a car is practically always to hand, getting to one’s destination does not involve any changes, while the increasing tendency to air-conditioning in cars means that one is to all effects and purposes protected from the weather; thus, cars have many advantages over LPT, and are a lot more comfortable.
— Undoubtedly the growth in traffic has a lot to do with the division of roles between various urban districts; people tend to live in one area of town (or even out of town), work in another, do their shopping somewhere else, and spend their leisure time in yet another area. This tendency is clearly illustrated by the emergence of shopping centres on the edge of cities.

— For many years, considerable investment was made in cities to meet the growing needs of the car: roads were widened, multi-storey car parks were built, and technical systems were put in place in an effort to keep pace with the constant growth in traffic.

— At the same time, many large cities (such as Hamburg, West Berlin or Nantes) got rid of their trams; LPT systems as well as the needs of cyclists or pedestrians were neglected in many metropolitan areas.

— In most cities, there was not enough investment in LPT or in pedestrian and cycling infrastructure to develop attractive alternatives to driving.

— Urban and regional transport systems are often insufficiently coordinated or interconnected: equally, in many cities the lack of inter connections means that the only way of getting by public transport from one part of town or suburb to another is via the city centre, which is unattractive in terms of speed compared to driving.

3.2.2 Of course, the EESC is aware that there are no universal solutions which are equally valid for all European cities: different cities and regions develop in different ways. Over the last few years or even decades, some cities have focused very intensively on supporting LPT systems as well as cyclists and pedestrians. For example, Brussels is clearly very different from Amsterdam or Münster in terms of cycling infrastructure, and this is reflected in the share of bicycles in total traffic. New tram routes in Freiburg, Mulhouse and recently Paris, as well as other cities, have persuaded many motorists to switch.

3.2.3 There are also a few positive examples here and there in the new Member States of municipalities successfully overcoming the transition and placing a positive emphasis on LPT. The city of Krakow in Poland is undeniably one such example (7). A visit to Krakow by the study group in charge of drafting this opinion made this abundantly clear. In Krakow, independent transport planners and environmental groups succeeded in convincing the city council to modernise and improve LPT, working within very tight financial constraints. Maintaining, modernising and to some extent expanding a fasci-

...natingly dense tram network, purchasing new trams, modernising the bus fleet and bus stops, beginning work on routes where LPT has priority, creating separate bus and tram lanes, together with coherent efforts to transform and partially re-orient LPT management and operations have begun to bear fruit. Cost recovery is approaching 90 %, well above average levels. This figures could even be improved, but for the significant losses in revenue facing municipal transport companies due to the central government’s decision to reduce fares for certain groups of passengers (school children, students, pensioners, the disabled, etc.) without providing compensation for the resulting loss in revenue.

3.2.4 Of course, the EESC is not opposed to reduced fares for such passengers, but it does feel that transport companies should not be saddled with the resulting costs.

3.2.5 However, analysis of Krakow’s success also highlights the problems faced by municipalities as well as LPT operators: a frequent lack of awareness in political circles (unfortunately this applies at all hierarchical levels), the social status of various transport modes (cars are perceived as modern, whereas LPT is old-fashioned, and is used by people with limited financial resources, who cannot afford a car), neglect of the technical impact of urban development on transport, and insufficient coordination between urban transport and transport in the surrounding areas.

3.2.6 In some cities there have been clear signs of at least a partial change in attitude, with investment in more environmental modes of transport, a development which the EESC welcomes. The Committee feels it should emphasise that, given the scarcity of public funding and the serious negative impact of traffic in city centres, the time when equal support could be given to all forms of transport has gone. In keeping with the ideas that were put forward almost ten years ago in the document on ‘citizens’ networks’, the role of the car in cities needs to be curtailed; this will not only involve huge efforts to make LPT and the cycling and pedestrian infrastructure more attractive, but also disincentives to driving. There is neither money nor space enough to develop infrastructure for both cars and LPT.

3.2.7 Thus, only by clearly prioritising objectives, with precedence for LPT, walking and cycling over car infrastructure, can living and environmental conditions be improved in metropolitan areas. In policy-making and planning processes as well as in financing, LPT concerns should therefore be taken into consideration before decisions are taken on zoning plans and

(7) Measures in Krakow were supported by the Caravelle programme as part of the Commission’s Civitas initiative.
3.2.8 The measures local authorities should take are so varied that an exhaustive list would go beyond the scope of an EESC opinion. Making LPT more attractive is not simply a matter of qualitatively and quantitatively improved services in terms of frequent departures, speed, cleanliness, safety, information, etc.; availability and accessibility (especially important for persons with disabilities, mothers with children, etc.) should be incorporated as essential elements of planning. Particular attention should be paid to accessibility with a view to providing attractive intermodal connections that enable all users to travel seamlessly from one locality to another. Affordable ticket prices have a significant effect on how people choose to travel. Political decision-makers should be provided with even more specific, practical ideas than is currently the case on how to achieve the required improvements in quality. Other measures to achieve a modal shift include fewer (and expensive) parking spaces in city centres compensated by more and cheaper parking at local rail and tram termini, as well as separate bus and tram lanes — which obviously should mean that less space is available for cars. (When drawing up plans to cut back on parking spaces, care should be taken to ensure the continued availability of spaces meant specifically for people with severely reduced mobility who cannot get about without using their own specially adapted cars.) London and Stockholm (following a popular vote) have begun to levy charges on drivers entering city centres (or using particular routes), and the results have been good. Madrid and some other European cities are considering such an option.

3.2.9 For example, most of the revenue from congestion charges in London is invested in the city’s bus network. This measure alone has resulted in substantially improved public transport, as well as lower greenhouse gas emissions (down by 10%), energy consumption (-20%) and nitrogen oxide and particle emissions (-16%) (f)

3.2.10 However, despite such examples of good practice — which have been promoted and documented through initiatives such as the EU’s Civitas Project — and widespread awareness of them, the overall trend has unfortunately not been towards a genuine renewal of urban transport policy. Day after day, western European cities are paying a high price for their transport policy mistakes; and now, it is the countries of Central and Eastern Europe which are in the course of repeating those very mistakes.

3.2.11 In the EESC’s view, top priority for any urban planning or transport policy should be, first, to prevent traffic ‘arising’, or at least to limit it; a second priority should be meeting or enabling the meeting of mobility needs wherever possible through environmental means of transport such as LPT, cycling or walking.

3.2.12 For this to happen, a wide-ranging mix of planning and organisational measures must be taken together with the appropriate investment decisions. There are many individual examples in European cities to show that sustainable urban transport planning can work, and that it enhances urban living conditions without undermining economic performance. However, it is also clear that many cities have so far failed to take such measures, due to a lack of expertise or to other political priorities.

3.2.13 The EESC would recommend that the Commission, the Council, and in particular the Committee of the Regions investigate the reasons why some cities have succeeded in progressing towards sustainable urban transport, whereas in others the situation continues to deteriorate. What is clear to the EESC is that this is not just a matter of money, but also to a very large extent of political awareness and of decisions taken in the fields of transport and housing policy. Working on this is at least as important as the compilation and dissemination of best practice.

3.3 The questions posed by the German presidency

3.3.1 Coordinating the planning of transport and housing structures (how can housing and LPT networks be developed in step with one another?)

3.3.1.1 There can be no doubt that in most cases there is a need for more effective coordination of planning. Clearly, transport and housing structures are mutually interdependent; this correlation has been well known for a long time. Hence, zoning and land-use planning, which are essentially municipal competences, are factors determining the type and volume of future traffic. In future, better coordination of regional and land-use planning should promote housing which is more closely geared to reducing traffic, while preventing uncontrolled development and the siting of industrial and commercial premises on the outskirts, at the expense of city centres.

3.3.1.2 Transport connections — for example by means of efficient LPT networks — make new and existing housing and business districts significantly more attractive. It is relatively straightforward to measure the impact in terms of changing land prices. However, such connections are also essential in order to prevent excessive new environmental impacts.
3.3.1.3 For the EESC, there can be no doubt that not only metropolitan areas but also all other urban areas must pay more attention than hitherto to ‘inward development’, with the emphasis on using inner city sites before turning to new sites on the outskirts or outside cities. This approach is consistent with the objectives of the EU’s soil strategy.

3.3.1.4 In order to regenerate urban living areas, it is important to develop transport-efficient, concentrated, multi-use housing structures with the requisite shopping and business facilities, and also to accept and develop much slower-moving motor vehicle traffic adapted to other road users. This requires the development of comprehensive traffic-calming measures, together with the development of ‘play streets’ in which cyclists and pedestrians have priority over motor vehicles, and of pedestrian zones. Socially and culturally enhanced urban areas with decentralised shopping and leisure facilities are particularly effective in reducing traffic.

3.3.2 Ensuring effective and attractive local public transport in order to relieve the pressure on urban areas arising from private transport (regulating markets, funding, customer satisfaction)

3.3.2.1 It will only become possible to ease the pressure arising from private transport on urban areas if travellers have access to attractive and efficient LPT systems. ‘Attractive’ and ‘efficient’ in this context means ensuring that the quantity and quality of services are such as to make travelling as simple and pleasant as possible.

3.3.2.2 In such an opinion the Committee cannot be expected to enumerate the full range of necessary measures relating to market regulation, financing and customer satisfaction. However, the attractiveness of transport modes is clearly determined not only by the quantity and quality of services, but also by price. Politicians have often announced their intentions to internalise the external costs of transport; doing so would obviously enhance the competitive position of LPT.

3.3.2.3 With public transport competing with cars, customers will only opt for LPT more often if it offers good value for money in the sense of providing high-quality services at a reasonable price. The only way for this to happen is by constantly making LPT more efficient. Optimising efficiency will also enable higher levels of cost recovery. However, full recovery of LPT investment and operating costs from fares cannot be a political objective, as it is a one-sided approach to measuring running costs which does not reflect internalisation of the external costs of urban traffic. The EESC therefore considers it extremely important that policy finally comes round to reflecting the time cost of transport and inevitably this would include the internalisation of external costs. Politicians have often announced their intentions to internalise the external costs of transport; doing so would obviously enhance the competitive position of LPT.

3.3.2.4 Infrastructure decisions taken at national level (e.g. highways used for local and regional transport in competition with LPT) and fiscal measures (transport subsidies, fuel taxes, green taxes to finance public transport, etc.) together with EU policies (e.g. in relation to trans-European networks) are factors which significantly affect choices as regards means of transport and therefore the prospects for developing financially viable and customer-oriented LPT with a dense network and frequent services.

3.3.2.5 Ensuring effective and attractive LPT and easing the burden on urban areas arising from private motor vehicle transport (as distinct from private transport by bike and on foot, which is to be encouraged) and road haulage requires integrated spatial and traffic planning; such planning should take the various types and purposes of transport into account and evaluate them in regional cooperation with outlying areas. Once objectives have been prioritised in a coordinated way and strategies have been worked out accordingly, a wide range of measures should be implemented through a process of political decision-making and communication. For this to happen, it is important to integrate planning and financing competences. In order to regenerate urban living areas, it is important to develop transport-efficient, concentrated, multi-use housing structures with the requisite shopping and business facilities, and also to accept and develop slow-moving transport.

3.3.2.6 To ensure attractive and convenient links between urban transport networks and individual traffic — whether long-distance or from the surrounding countryside — economical and convenient parking facilities should be provided at suitable transport interchanges on the outskirts (Park and Ride) (see also point 3.2.8).

3.3.2.7 As a guiding measure to prevent traffic and promote a modal shift, the EESC would like to see gradual upwards alignment of EU fuel taxation, thus ensuring uniform conditions for competition and creating financing sources for LPT.

3.3.3 Encouraging people to cycle and walk

3.3.3.1 In terms of the number of trips (as opposed to the distance covered), one in three journeys are entirely covered on foot or by bicycle, which clearly reflects the key role of cycle and pedestrian traffic in European cities. On the other hand, over half of all journeys of less than 5 kilometres are done by car, even though this distance could often be covered more
quickly by bicycle. By making LPT stops more easily accessible and improving parking and lift sharing options, even longer distances could be covered in city centres using a combination of environmentally friendly transport modes, bringing about a change in the modal split. (The issue of promoting cross-border cycle traffic at European level is covered in a separate opinion on Promotion of cross-border cycle transport TEN/277, K/CESE 148/2007.)

3.3.3.2 As a means of public transport, ‘Citybike’ makes it possible to cycle throughout the city. ‘Citybikes’ can be hired from public bike terminals in the city and returned to any terminal. All that is required is to log in, for example by using a credit card. Hire charges should be very reasonable.

3.3.3.3 Cycling and walking are not only extremely environmental, but also healthy. Given the high healthcare costs arising in our society from a lack of exercise, there are also very strong health policy reasons for promoting cycling and walking.

3.3.3.4 It is readily apparent that appropriate, high-quality infrastructure must be in place for this to happen. Cycling infrastructure includes not only urban cycle paths, but also secure bike parking facilities and other services (e.g. the option of taking bikes on LPT and trains). The best example in Europe of how to develop cycling infrastructure is probably the Netherlands. In view of this, the question we need to ask is not so much what municipalities can do, but why they have not yet managed to use and implement relatively cheap options to make cycling and walking more attractive.

3.3.3.5 Above all, it is urban areas which are most in need of improved residential and visiting conditions and where the implementation of EU directives on air quality and environmental noise is longest overdue; it is here that the promotion of cycling and walking is of particular relevance. In comparing the modal split in various European metropolitan and urban areas, it becomes clear that the state of cycling and pedestrian infrastructure together with the accompanying measures to promote such transport and enhance its image are of crucial relevance to ensuring that it accounts for a high proportion of everyday trips: such measures include expanding traffic-restricted and traffic-free zones, dense networks, right of way for cyclists and pedestrians at crossings and traffic lights, making pavements wider, road signs, visiting and resting facilities, bike stands and ‘bike stations’, publicity campaigns (‘walk to school’ days, ‘cycle to work’ competitions for commuters, car-free days, the possibility of transporting bikes on LPT). It is also helpful to appoint a local government officer with specific responsibility for cycle paths and footpaths.

3.3.4 Using modern information, communication and control technologies

3.3.4.1 Transport telematics can help to bring about a modal shift to LPT and ensure better use of existing capacities, thus making transport safer and reducing its environmental impact. However, environmental concerns and modal shift have not in the past played a major part in the development and use of transport telematics. The EESC is concerned to note that millions of euros of research and development grants and other funding in this field have tended to focus more on keeping motor vehicle traffic moving, without any easing of pressure on the environment. In addition, releasing additional capacity through a more even flow of traffic has done nothing to curb the building of new roads or the development of the existing road network. Shifting car transport in congested conditions to LPT does not help to ensure a more even load on public transport systems, and therefore, from the perspective of LPT, it has more of a counter-productive effect.

3.3.4.2 The EESC is in favour of prioritising the use of transport telematics in LPT to provide comprehensive transport and passenger information. The Committee also feels that transport telematics has potential in terms of managing fleets of vehicles and urban logistics (ensuring that vehicles do not travel empty, and combining individual trips). At the same time, telematic transport systems could be used as part of integrated transport planning to achieve greater efficiency by preventing the expansion of existing infrastructures and new building. Generally speaking, using telematics in the field of transport only makes sense if it translates into fewer trips by motor vehicles.

3.3.5 Reducing urban pollution

3.3.5.1 The pressures on the urban environment from traffic — whether moving or at a standstill — such as fine particulate matter, noise and land use can only be reduced by means of the proposed measures to give clear priority to the environmental alliance of cycling, walking and LPT, enabling implementation of the relevant EU directives on health and on making cities more attractive. Important and useful as they often are, technical measures such as soot filters will not suffice to reduce the pressures on the urban environment. Local authorities will not be able to avoid making structural changes to transport policy.

4. The Committee’s proposals

Meaningful development of LPT is only possible if the European Commission, Member States and local actors take coordinated action to develop an active public transport policy, which will also involve questioning the dominance of the car.
Calls for action at EU level

4.1 The Commission should revise the rules for allocating funding for regional development measures. The EESC proposes to make it obligatory to dedicate a defined, high proportion of transport investments from the ERDF to public transport projects, as in the case of the Cohesion Fund.

4.2 Until such time as the actual costs incurred are covered by road pricing charges and other charges, there is no justification for seeking to fully recoup the costs involved in maintaining railway lines.

4.3 The internalisation of external costs in the transport sector, together with measures to guide choice as regards means of transport by using the price mechanism (motor-vehicle taxation, fuel taxes, parking charges, road pricing charges) are essential basic conditions for bringing about a sea change aimed at extending the supply of services, achieving integration, boosting demand and enhancing the level of cost recovery in the public transport sector. The EES has repeatedly advocated the internalisation of external costs and the Commission has made pronouncements along these lines on numerous occasions. No action has, however, been taken. Among other things, in its planned Green Paper on urban transport the Commission should finally adopt an appropriate position and take action without delay.

4.4 The EESC asks the Commission to formulate a concrete EU support programme, along the lines of the Marco Polo Programme, for promoting the shifting of traffic away from private motor vehicle transport and towards public transport; among other things, such a support programme could be used to finance pilot projects for futuristic local and regional public passenger transport, particularly in the CEECs. Such pilot projects should be introduced on routes having a large pool of potential passengers which has hitherto remained untapped and that should involve modernising infrastructure (including new building work where advisable), modernising rolling stock, introducing attractive timetables and bringing about an optimal level of integration with other local and regional public passenger transport services. Pilot initiatives in cities should also receive support.

4.5 It would also be worthwhile to introduce a specific EU support programme to promote mobility and urban development/regional planning. Under the proposed programme, pilot projects could be promoted which do not lead to random, uncontrolled development but rather serve to promote existing settlement areas and the development of a graduated system of central areas, and define settlement axes, which could then be opened up, in practice, through the provision of attractive local passenger rail transport or LPT services.

4.6 With a view to improving basic statistical data, the EESC also recommends the introduction of a reporting obligation in respect of selected public transport parameters in the individual Member States and the systematic dissemination of examples of best practice in public transport. The European Local Transport Information Service (ELTIS), together with its internet portal (www.eltis.org), an initiative launched by the European Commission, provide a good basis for implementing the abovementioned proposals. The cases listed by ELTIS as examples of individual measures should be systematically extended by setting out examples from the new Member States and the candidate states.

4.7 The European Commission and the Council should consider making it compulsory for local authorities to draw up sustainable urban transport plans, with a binding objective of a modal shift to environmentally friendly transport (local public transport, cycling, walking). Such plans should comply with minimum European requirements, which remain to be established. In the event of municipalities failing to draw up such plans, they should be barred from receiving support from Community funds.

Calls for action by the Member States

4.8 The EESC calls on the new Member States to take on their responsibility for local passenger rail transport and LPT, and to support it, for example by means of legislation on financing municipal transport. They must not let municipalities down in terms of financial and organisational support.

4.9 It is unacceptable that operators have to bear the financial burden arising from — however enlightened — social policy decisions (such as reduced fares for socially disadvantaged groups). The EESC feels that this represents a irresponsible attitude on the part of governments towards LPT.

4.10 The Member States should be aware of their obligation to contribute financially to the social services which they require transport enterprises to provide (such as lower fares for schoolchildren, pensioners, persons with disabilities, etc.).

4.11 Member States should press ahead with the internalisation of the external costs arising from private motor vehicles, so that the resulting revenue can be used for large-scale development of public transport services, thus encouraging a modal shift.

4.12 If necessary, Member States could work together with the European Commission to disseminate best practice as widely as possible in promoting positive development of LPT. Although lack of money is one of the problems faced by LPT, it is not the only one: in the absence of awareness, new ideas or relevant benchmarks, even large sums of money will not always help.
Calls for action by the municipalities

4.13 Ensuring effective and attractive LPT and easing the burden on urban areas arising from private motor vehicle transport and road haulage requires integrated spatial and traffic planning, which on the one hand is geared to preventing traffic and on the other emphasises environmental transport modes. To this end, it is essential to take the various types and purposes of transport into account and evaluate them in regional cooperation with outlying areas.

4.14 Once objectives have been prioritised in a coordinated way and strategies have been worked out accordingly, a wide range of measures should be implemented by municipalities through a process of political decision-making and communication.

4.15 Local authorities should set themselves goals clearly defining the means and the extent to which they intend to increase the share of LPT and the environmental alliance of cycling and walking, with a reduction in absolute terms of private motor vehicle transport. For this to happen, it is important to integrate planning and financing competences.

4.16 Forward-looking public transport planning as part of municipal services of general interest must also take into account land acquisition policies e.g. for public transport routes and stations.

4.17 Involving citizens and user groups in planning processes is very important for successful public transport systems. The EESC therefore recommends that local authorities closely involve local people in developing their local public transport systems.


The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Dimitris DIMITRIADIS

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Promotion of cross-border cycle transport

(2007/C 168/18)

In a letter dated 7 November 2006, the German Federal Ministry of Transport, in the context of the German EU Presidency, asked the EESC, under Article 262 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, to draw up an opinion on The promotion of cross-border cycle transport.

On 21 November 2006 the Committee Bureau instructed the Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society to prepare the Committee’s work on the subject.

Given the urgent nature of the work, the European Economic and Social Committee appointed Mr Simons as rapporteur-general at its 435th plenary session, held on 25 and 26 April 2007 (meeting of 25 April), and adopted the following opinion by 128 votes to two, with eight abstentions.

1. Conclusions

1.1 There is (still) no European cycling policy. The European Commission does support, by means of subsidy programmes, research, development and the implementation of projects as part of policy on sustainable mobility and energy use.

1.2 The EESC recommends that cycling be integrated into transport and infrastructure policy in general and in particular be given substantial attention in the forthcoming Green Paper on urban transport.

1.3 In Europe every train, including high-speed international trains, should be obliged to make space available for transporting, among other things, bicycles.

1.4 Minimum quality standards should be introduced for cycling infrastructure built with the aid of European subsidies.

1.5 The EESC recommends that EU subsidy budgets also be made available for the development and maintenance of cycling infrastructure. Good-quality infrastructure already exists in some European cities and countries.