Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the ‘Green Paper: TEN-T: A policy review. Towards a better integrated trans-European transport network at the service of the common transport policy’

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Rapporteur: Mr SIMONS

On 4 February 2009 the European Commission decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 262(1) of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the

‘Green Paper: TEN-T: A policy review. Towards a better integrated trans-European transport network at the service of the common transport policy’

The Committee for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society, which was responsible for preparing the Committee’s work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 8 September 2009. The rapporteur was Mr Simons.

At its 456th plenary session, held on 30 September and 1 October 2009 (meeting of 30 September), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 167 votes to 1 with 5 abstentions.

1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1 The EESC agrees with the Commission that the TEN-T Guidelines need to be radically revised to take account of the accession of a large number of new Member States to the EU since 1996. In view of this and of the shift in emphasis in policy priorities, particularly heightened concern about the environment and climate change, a re-orientation of the Community’s transport infrastructure network is required.

1.2 Given the problem of increasing CO₂ emissions, and infrastructure and organisational gaps in relation to goods transport, the Committee concurs with the Commission in its search for co-modal solutions for freight transport so as to create synergies for users.

1.3 In the framing of a new TEN-T, the EESC wants to see explicit consideration given to so-called neighbourhood policy, i.e. connections to the east and south of the EU, although the Commission and the Member States should focus above all on the network rather than on individual infrastructure projects. This also promotes solidarity between the Member States.

1.4 The Commission presents three options for the shape of a future TEN-T. The Committee agrees with the Council that this should be a two-layer structure with a comprehensive network and a core network comprising a geographically defined priority network and a conceptual pillar to help integrate the various transport policy and infrastructure aspects. The EESC believes this will make it possible to deploy EU funding more efficiently and effectively than hitherto. A body should be set up to coordinate the deployment of funding.

1.5 The Committee urges the Commission to put in place a more binding implementation framework, including adequate penalties, for the development of the ‘priority network’ and for interoperable traffic management systems.

1.6 As regards future planning of the TEN-T, the Committee endorses the Commission’s approach as set out in its Green Paper, based on the principle that each mode should be used according to its comparative advantages within co-modal transport chains and that each mode thus plays an important role in achieving the Community’s climate change objectives. The objective must still be to shift towards the most environment-friendly transport chain.

2. Introduction

2.2 The Commission intends to involve as many stakeholders as possible in the review, so as to draw on the knowledge, experience and views available. The Commission launched a public consultation to this end that was completed on 30 April 2009.

2.3 The Commission plans to analyse the findings of the public consultation and use them to feed into its work on developing a new TEN-T policy. The rest of 2009 is likely to be taken up with processing responses to the Green Paper and undertaking any necessary research. At the beginning of 2010, the Commission plans to announce the methodology of the policy, and, at the end of 2010, to present draft legislation, i.e. the revised version of the TEN-T Guidelines and possibly the TEN-T Regulation.

2.4 The EC Treaty (Articles 154 to 156) defines TEN-T policy as a means of achieving the objectives of the internal market in relation to growth and job creation, as well as realising social, economic and territorial cohesion, which must benefit all citizens and businesses.

2.5 In addition, sustainable development must be achieved by ensuring that environmental protection requirements have a key place in the policy. TEN-T policy should be designed to make a noticeable contribution to the Community's 20/20/20 climate change objectives.

2.6 EU policy on the trans-European networks was developed between 1990 and 1995 and formalised by a decision of the European Parliament and the Council in 1996. Since then, a total of EUR 400 billion has been invested in transport infrastructure projects of common interest, though there has been considerable delay in completing many of these projects. In the early stages of the TEN-T programme (1996-2003), most of the priority projects completed by the Member States were road projects. Further infrastructure for more environment-friendly transport modes must be built without delay wherever it is apparent that it is needed.

2.7 Some 30% of the EUR 400 billion invested has come from Community funding, such as the TEN-T budget, the Cohesion Fund, the ERDF and the EIB. It is estimated that some EUR 500 billion of further investment is still required. The plan is for 80% of funding reserved for TEN-T priority projects to be allocated to the railways sector.

2.8 Experience has shown that it is hard for the general public to see the results of TEN-T policy and its added value. The Commission tries to rectify this in the approach it adopts in its Green Paper and makes climate change targets a central plank of future TEN-T policy.

2.9 The Commission itself concludes that TEN-T policy needs to be radically overhauled. Through a process incorporating economic and environmental targets and explicitly geared to the need for efficient passenger and freight transport on the basis of co-modality and innovative techniques, the aim is to establish a healthy basis for an effective contribution to the Community's climate objectives.

2.10 Since the scope of the revision is so broad – in political and socio-economic, environmental, institutional, geographical and technical terms – the Commission decided to publish a Green Paper in which it sets out its ideas and gives stakeholders the opportunity to contribute actively to the discussion and make suggestions for a new TEN-T policy through the consultation exercise.

2.11 In its resolution of 22 April 2009 on the Green Paper on the future TEN-T policy, the European Parliament stated that although it accepted the idea of a TEN-T conceptual pillar, albeit vague, it also saw the benefit of concrete projects, and considered that an overproportionate share of priority projects should include environment-friendly modes of transport.

2.12 At its meeting on 11 and 12 June 2009, the Council of Ministers took the position that all current TEN-T priority projects should be an integral part of a coherent priority network bringing together both infrastructure already completed or under construction and projects of common interest. These projects should be multimodal, with due attention being given to nodes and intermodal connections.

2.13 The Council also noted that TEN-T policy should contribute significantly to climate change goals and environmental objectives. It added that the optimal integration and interconnection of all transport modes, both physical infrastructure and intelligent transport systems, should make efficient co-modal transport services possible and so constitute a strong basis for supporting the efforts of the transport sector towards reduction of CO\textsubscript{2} and other emissions.

3. General comments

3.1 The Commission has realised that implementation of the decision taken by the European Parliament and the Council in 1996 to create a trans-European infrastructure network of common interest has not been proceeding according to plan, and mentions this in its communication Trans-European networks: Towards an integrated approach (COM(2007) 135 final). The EESC considers the Commission's consequent steps to lay the foundation for a radical revision of TEN-T policy through the public consultation in this Green Paper to be appropriate.
3.2 Another reason the Committee feels that a thorough overhaul of the TEN-T Guidelines is needed is that a large number of new Member States have joined the EU since 1996. This calls for a review of the Community's transport infrastructure network.

3.3 The Commission's policy evaluation of the TEN-T Guidelines notes that the network planning originally envisaged, where the intention was to bring together large parts of national networks for the different modes and connect them at national borders, has lost momentum as a result of the Union's enlargement.

3.4 Given that a huge amount of funding will be needed to implement a new TEN-T, the Committee thinks that as many relevant factors and dimensions as possible must be taken into account in order to make appropriate and responsible decisions. As the basis for this, the Committee recommends that financing should reflect objectives rather than the other way round.

3.5 The foundations of future TEN-T policy are anchored in the EC Treaty. Articles 154 to 156 set out the issues that must be taken into account. Sustainable development and the associated climate objectives have not been sufficiently emphasised in the past, but the Committee agrees with the Commission that they must be a substantial part of transport policy in general and thus also of TEN-T policy. Indeed, the Committee already pointed to this in its opinion of 13 March 2008 (TEN/298 – CESE 488/2008), in which it also stressed the importance of an integrated approach.

3.6 To implement the treaty provisions, TEN-T Guidelines have been drawn up which contain provisions for selecting projects of common interest that are supported by the Member States. The ultimate purpose of these guidelines is to create a single multimodal network in order to make a safe and efficient transport network feasible on the basis of an innovative approach.

3.7 The Committee concurs with the Commission in its search for co-modal solutions for freight transport to overcome problems of rising CO₂ emissions, infrastructure and organisational gaps. The Committee agrees with the Commission that developing Motorways of the Sea, for instance, is very important for the further development of TEN-T.

3.8 The Commission thinks that revising TEN-T policy should build on the results achieved so far, and should ensure continuity with the previous approach. The Committee questions whether this is consistent with fundamental revision of TEN-T policy, since an evaluation of current priority projects listed in Annex 3 of the TEN Guidelines based on objective criteria would, in its view, have to entail adaptation of the annex, which could logically result in projects listed there also disappearing.

3.9 As far as establishing a new TEN-T policy is concerned, the Committee agrees with the Commission that this must be based on a two-fold objective, covering economic and environmental factors. The Committee believes that an integrated approach produces synergies, especially in the case of projects relating to EU enlargement. This is why it is important that the environmental impact, including climate effects, should also have been taken into account when choosing a network. Thus a balance should be sought between economic requirements and concern for the environment, through promoting a sustainable and efficient transport system based on the principle of co-modality.

3.10 An example of this is the integration of air and rail transport for distances of up to 500 km, promoted via market forces. High-speed rail services play a very important role in passenger transport in this context, and there are also interesting opportunities for integrating airports with Europe's rail network in the case of freight transport.

3.11 The Committee believes that the new TEN-T should focus principally on the network – both physical and non-physical – with emphasis on so-called neighbourhood policy, e.g. infrastructure connecting the western part of the EU to the east, and north to south (Via Baltica, Helsinki-Athens). In the Committee's view, the neighbourhood approach promotes solidarity among the people of the EU.

3.12 The Commission suggests that, in order to determine European added value, all projects of common interest selected must be subject to a standardised multicriteria and cost-benefit analysis which could take all factors, including non-monetary factors, into account. This should allow EU subsidies to be allocated fairly and objectively, and to be limited to projects which really produce added value for the EU. The Committee advocates the application of any method that will lead to more efficient and effective use of EU funding.

3.13 In particular, a standardised approach of this kind would be useful in tackling cross-border infrastructure bottlenecks, where the problem is often how to share costs. This should lead to a streamlining of the TEN-T programme, while the focus can shift more to the economy-environment complex.
3.14 The Commission asks in the Green Paper which of the following options would be preferred as regards the form of a future TEN-T:

- maintaining the current dual-layer structure with the comprehensive network and (unconnected) priority projects;

- a single layer consisting of priority projects, possibly linked to each other in a priority network;

- a dual-layer structure with the comprehensive network and a core network comprising a – geographically defined – priority network and a conceptual pillar to help integrate the various transport policy and transport infrastructure aspects.

3.15 The Committee would favour the last of these three options. It believes that EU funding must be deployed more effectively and that concentrating funding on a core network is the best way of achieving this. Over the years, the comprehensive network has involved applying some Community transport legislation to fit the scope of the current TEN-T network, and so it cannot simply be dropped but will have to remain in place. The projects concerned would then no longer be eligible for subsidies under the TEN-T budget, though they could be financed through the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund.

3.16 In order to deploy EU funding more efficiently and effectively, the Committee thinks that a body should be set up to coordinate the use of funding.

3.17 The geographically defined priority network should in the Committee’s view consist of genuinely multimodal axes which interconnect major economic and population centres and link these centres with the main nodes such as sea and inland waterways ports, and airports. This network would have to meet the requirements relating to environmental protection and promotion of social and sustainable development.

4. Specific comments

4.1 According to the Commission, sustainable development and above all the ambitious climate targets set by the EU in December 2008 necessitate adaptation of the approach to the trans-European networks. The Committee agrees with the Commission that climate issues alone would already be sufficient reason to revise the guidelines, but points out that the failure to complete planned projects and EU enlargement are also grounds for revision.

4.2 In principle, the Committee shares the Commission’s view that all projects of common interest should be subject to cost-benefit analysis, although there should also be more scope to use methods that serve the same purpose. However, the Committee also points to the need for a more uniform way of defining and evaluating externalities.

4.3 The Committee agrees with the Commission that revision of the TEN-T must consist in complementing a network of major interlinked infrastructure projects with a conceptual network of this type of project, and would stress that the Commission must focus a large part of its coordination efforts on realising these sorts of projects.

4.4 The Committee notes that systematic investment in developing research and technology in Europe has produced new ways of realising the goals of European transport policy using other means than investment in material infrastructure alone.

4.5 The Commission has set out the options and policy plans in various communications, such as the Transport Logistics Action Plan and the Action Plan for the Deployment of Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS). When implementing these new technologies, in any case, negative effects on working conditions and data protection must be avoided.

4.6 There is also the Green Car initiative, a part of the European Economic Recovery Plan, which sets out how the effectiveness and efficiency of Europe’s transport system can be enhanced by applying clean propulsion technology and intelligent logistics. The European action programme NAIADES, which is broadly aimed at promoting inland waterways transport, should also be mentioned in relation to innovation.

4.7 Point 4.5 of the above-mentioned Logistics Action Plan contains a brief description of the Green Corridors concept. The Committee would appreciate more details on this, since it believes that the Green Corridors idea also means making alternative modes available for traffic between nodes so that cost-effective choices can be made.

4.8 Thus, development of TEN-T has so far been seen as an undertaking on the part of the Member States concerned to take action. At present, national governments are responsible for establishing infrastructure, but the Committee urges the Commission to design a more binding implementation framework, including adequate penalties, for development of the ‘priority network’. The same approach could be adopted for interoperable traffic management systems.
4.9 In the Committee’s view, discussion of the priority network should focus explicitly on completing the Motorways of the Sea, paying more attention to the wider logistical network, so that EU sea ports are provided with good access and adequate hinterland links, bearing in mind that there must be no distortion of competition.

4.10 In conclusion, the Committee agrees that many of the issues raised by the Commission in its Green Paper must be taken into account in future planning of the TEN-T. These include questions relating to the differing needs of passenger and freight traffic, the sensitivity of airports to fuel price, security, economic development and environmental protection, the sea port issue mentioned in point 4.9 and the freight logistics concept, based on the principle that

4.11 each mode should be used according to its comparative advantage within efficient co-modal transport chains and that each mode plays an important role in achieving the Community’s climate change objectives. The objective must still be to shift towards the most environment-friendly transport chain.

Brussels, 30 September 2009.

The President of the European Economic and Social Committee
Mario SEPI