

III

(Preparatory acts)

COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

81st PLENARY SESSION HELD ON 5-7 OCTOBER 2009

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on 'Competitive rail freight transport'

(2010/C 79/09)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS:

- welcomes the legal act regulating the way in which the European rail network for competitive freight transport functions. The aim is to establish an efficient freight transport network through the intelligent use of the existing infrastructure or its development.
- considers that consistent implementation of the provisions of the above legal act will quickly raise the effectiveness of rail transport. This will ensure that, as the safest and most environment-friendly mode of transport, rail will be capable of competing with other modes of transport in terms of effectiveness.
- considers that when rail freight transport corridors are created, there should be links to other forms of transport through appropriate land, sea and air terminals, including inland ports.
- draws attention to the development of logistical centres involving local and regional authorities, which should be taken into account when setting up a European rail network for competitive freight transport. Local and regional authorities should be involved in the planning and development of logistical centres of this kind.
- draws attention to certain provisions in the Regulation which might lead to excessive, unnecessary red tape in the systems governing the European rail network.
- stresses that, comparatively speaking, rail freight transport is environment-friendly and safe, and by making it more effective and competitive it can become an alternative to modes of transport that consume more energy and are less user-friendly and safe.
- underlines that establishing a European rail transport network requires an international structure that is capable of boosting coordination between Member States and infrastructure managers within the framework of individual transport corridors.

Rapporteur: Mr Witold Krochmal, Mayor of Wołów, (PL/UEN-EA)

Reference document

Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning a European rail network for competitive freight

COM(2008) 852 final

I. POLICY PROPOSALS

INTRODUCTION

1. The proposed Regulation of the EP and the Council on a European rail network for competitive freight was adopted in response to the need to create the safest, most effective and most environmentally sound freight transport system for use by the public and businesses.

2. In accordance with the 2001 White Paper on transport and in the light of current changes within the structure of the EU and the constant new challenges facing EU Member States, it is essential to focus on developing co-modality between all modes of transport.

3. Whereas a series of measures have already been carried out in the area of road and air transport with positive results, there is still a need for action in rail transport.

4. The proposal under consideration emerged following broad consultation among Member States, railway undertakings, infrastructure managers, representatives of industry and freight forwarding firms.

5. As a result of this work, it was established that setting up international rail corridors for competitive freight would make rail more competitive within a short space of time and help to improve macro-economic indicators.

Policy proposals

6. The Committee welcomes the legal act regulating the way in which the European rail network for competitive freight transport functions. The aim is to establish an efficient freight transport network through the intelligent use of the existing infrastructure or its development.

7. The Committee considers that consistent implementation of the provisions of the above legal act will quickly raise the effectiveness of rail transport. This will ensure that, as the safest and most environment-friendly mode of transport, rail will be capable of competing with other modes of transport in terms of effectiveness.

8. The Committee considers that when rail freight transport corridors are created, there should be links to other forms of transport through appropriate land, sea and air terminals, including inland ports.

9. The Committee draws attention to the development of logistical centres involving local and regional authorities, which should be taken into account when setting up a European rail network for competitive freight transport. Local and regional authorities should be involved in the planning and development of logistical centres of this kind.

10. The Committee draws attention to certain provisions in the Regulation which might lead to excessive, unnecessary red tape in the systems governing the European rail network.

11. The Committee stresses that, comparatively speaking, rail freight transport is environment-friendly and safe, and by making it more effective and competitive it can become an alternative to modes of transport that consume more energy and are less user-friendly and safe.

12. Measures to make European rail transport more effective and competitive must be geared towards solving existing problems without delay, such as:

- Improving cooperation between infrastructure managers and Member States in order to eliminate border effects, carry out investments, and enhance cooperation and coordination between different transport modes as regards the use of rail.
- Developing and expanding intermodal terminals for rail transport and making them more effective by using the latest technologies to manage them.
- Improving interoperability significantly.
- Minimising the loss of efficiency associated with the break-up of companies following market liberalisation
- Setting up an effective rail network that connects the whole of the EU from north to south and east to west.

13. Within the framework of these measures, it is important to utilise initiatives already adopted and work carried out at national and international level in the following areas:

- Access and the levying of charges for infrastructure

- Capacity and traffic management of transport corridors
- Railway safety
- Developing the interoperability of rail transport.

At the same time, the following measures are necessary:

- development of route networks geared to capacity,
- the establishment of efficient new bypass routes for freight (analogous to bypasses for road transport) for heavily used railway junctions.

14. Experiences from the trans-European transport network (TEN-T), the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS) and other previous and current activities will make it possible to implement a European rail network for competitive freight transport far more effectively and quickly as a result of the synergy between all measures.

15. Establishing a European rail transport network requires an international structure that is capable of boosting coordination between Member States and infrastructure managers within the framework of individual transport corridors. These structures should oblige Member States to honour their commitments to establishing corridors.

16. It is essential for the relevant EU bodies or Member States or the appropriate management structures to continue work on eliminating current restrictions which lower effectiveness and thus the competitiveness of rail transport, such as:

- the elimination of language barriers in cross-border transport;
- the lack of uniform training programmes for engine drivers covering the principles of rail transport throughout the EU,
- the absence of common standards on safety and capacity,
- non-uniform use of information and communications technologies (ICT) and satellite and radio systems,
- absence of a system and of clear-cut civil liability for transport delivery in inter-modal transport chains,
- existence of a large number of technical and administrative problems during international rail transport border crossings,
- the elimination of capacity bottlenecks, particularly in conurbations, to separate freight and passenger transport and to improve the competitiveness of rail as a transport mode overall, insofar as this is technically and logistically feasible,

- track gauge differences
- failure to implement standards on transport punctuality, especially in combined transport, e.g. rail-road transport,
- lack of consensus on optimal train dimensions and lengths with due consideration for increasing transport capacity and protecting the environment.

17. It would make sense to introduce a set of rail standards. This would reduce logistics costs, improve competitiveness, make the markets more accessible, strengthen interoperability and intermodality, and ensure there is a balance between economic development and environmental requirements. Rail standards would also make the railways an integral part of the European business network, adding value and helping to optimise production, supply and distribution processes.

18. Should it not be possible to give this body the powers to eliminate barriers, the EU or Member States should eliminate these restrictions directly through their own measures.

19. The structure governing the corridors should not become bureaucratic but should function flexibly in accordance with the market situation and resist unwarranted interference from Member States and EU institutions.

20. Demand for transport services, should also determine the number of rail freight corridors that are to be created in individual countries.

21. The creation of a European rail network for competitive freight transport will achieve the goals set provided that there is close cooperation with the local and regional authorities through which the rail network corridors will pass.

22. This cooperation should involve both the planning and coordination of investment associated with the establishment of the networks, as well as the use, repair and modernisation of rail transport corridors, taking account of existing infrastructure and traffic.

23. While recognising the importance of ensuring that tracks for freight transport are of good quality, are reliable and that there is a good transport service, it is important that operational principles are set for both forms of transport on tracks which will not be separated for freight and passengers, and that efforts are made to take regional and local interests into account. This should be carried out in such a way that there is no negative impact on the mobility of residents and that it does not contradict other social interests.

24. Appropriate spatial planning at regional and urban level with due consideration for corridor routes and location of terminals and handling stations will increase the effectiveness of networks significantly and at the same time help to improve the economy of cities and regions.

25. Local and regional authorities as well as EU Member States must take steps to adapt road traffic flows to the distribution and delivery to customers of goods transported by rail.

26. Local and regional authorities have greater scope for cooperation and dialogue with producers and businesses which make use of rail transport, and are able far more effectively to encourage users of transport services to adopt a specific approach to selecting transport modes and particular routes. This ensures that businesses adopt the best possible approach when selecting modes of transport for their products, with due consideration for environmental safety, reliability, speed and competitive prices too of course.

II. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

27. While recognising that the establishment of an internal rail market is an essential element of the Lisbon Strategy and the strategy for sustainable development in the European Union, the Committee of the Regions acknowledges that the Regulation issued by the EP and the Council is a vital legal act enabling rail to compete with other, less environmentally and user-friendly transport modes. In the process of implementation, appropriate account should be taken of existing traffic, for example passenger services, when allocating routes for priority freight transport. Moreover, the same priority should in principle be given to national traffic as to cross-border traffic.

28. A significant role in implementing the Regulation will be played by local and regional authorities, which through appropriate planning and skilful investment in roads, regional rail and ports, will be able to significantly increase the effectiveness and competitiveness of rail transport.

29. It is essential that the principles for transporting dangerous materials are set in cooperation with rail corridor managers and local and regional authorities.

30. Despite the fact the decisions to set up freight transport corridors will be discussed and taken at Community level, local and regional authorities should at all events be consulted beforehand, i.e. during the planning and approval stage at national level.

31. These consultations should identify the essential infrastructure elements associated with creating a corridor, thus ensuring that its route does not have a negative impact on the lives of local communities who live near to the corridor's path and make it easier to select the most appropriate areas for the corridors to run through.

32. It is crucial to ensure that high-speed passenger networks, conventional speed and local passenger networks and all types of freight networks co-exist as smoothly as possible in a given area.

33. On account of the specific parameters for rail lines in transport corridors, there will need to be changes in the organisation of both road and rail transport in some localities. For this reason, it is essential for local and regional authorities to be provided with appropriate financial instruments enabling them to carry out the investment and modernisation work that is required for the routes of the lines that run through these places. At the same time, the legal framework for successful property expropriation in the public interest should be simplified, so that modernisation and building plans for routes and infrastructures are not held up by the principle of appropriate compensation for expropriated property.

34. These instruments should be available for use within the timeframe for implementing the provisions of Chapter 2, Article 3(3) of the Regulation, i.e. the legally binding deadlines laid down in the Regulation for implementing individual rail freight corridors.

35. Existing logistical centres involving local or regional authorities should be used effectively and included in the system of rail freight transport corridors.

36. Using infrastructure managed by local or regional authorities should, in accordance with Article 4 (2) of the Regulation, lead to the participation of representatives of local or regional authorities in bodies which run freight transport corridors.

37. The number of rail freight corridors in individual EU Member States established in Article 3 of the Regulation should be set in accordance with the potential demand for transport services, an analysis of their effectiveness and the actual technical feasibility of implementation within the deadlines established in the regulations.

38. The requirement for a certain number of transport corridors in individual EU Member States, as determined by the number of tonne-kilometres of rail freight transport in a given Member State, should be dropped.

39. The market research described in Article 5 (3) of the Regulation should be carried out in accordance with needs, to be determined by the corridor managers. In this connection, this research should not necessarily be conducted every year, as required by the Regulation.

40. In the initial period following the introduction of the Regulation, any decisions on the location of rail freight transport corridors must be based exclusively on substantive reasons linked to the effectiveness, accessibility, quality and size of the infrastructure, where possible leaving aside political reasons.

41. The establishment of rail transport corridors should be monitored to ensure that norms on environmental protection and public health are respected, particularly those concerning noise, transport safety and other phenomena since these norms prevent

negative repercussions on the environment of local residents. All action should be underpinned by criteria that 1) ensure that residents living near freight transport corridors are not at a disadvantage in terms of hygiene requirements and living conditions and 2) prioritise transport safety.

42. The Committee of the Region proposes that the European Commission implement the Regulation as quickly as possible and take account of the observations and proposals put forward in this opinion.

Brussels, 7 October 2009

The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Luc VAN DEN BRANDE
