

4.13. Practical studies should be carried out to discover the resources already being deployed on this task by the general public, the agricultural sector and regional and local authorities. The work on cultural landscape indicators should be continued and their inclusion in the

system of rural and agricultural indicators should be considered.

4.14. It is important to raise public awareness of these issues in urban and rural areas.

Brussels, 14 June 2000.

The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Jos CHABERT

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on 'The accessibility of rural areas'

(2000/C 317/06)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

having regard to its Bureau's decision of 2 June 1999 to draw up an opinion, under Article 265(5) of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on The accessibility of rural areas, and to entrust Commission 2 (Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries) with the relevant preparatory work;

having regard to the Committee's opinion of 16 January 1997 on a Rural Development Policy (CdR 389/96 fin)⁽¹⁾;

having regard to the Cork Declaration of November 1996 on rural development;

having regard to the Committee's opinion of 14 January 1999 on Agenda 2000 — Reform of the CAP (CdR 273/98 fin)⁽²⁾;

having regard to the Committee's opinion of 14 January 1999 on the Proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) on support for rural development from the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) (CdR 308/98 fin)⁽³⁾;

having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/1999 of 17 May 1999 on support for rural development from the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF)⁽⁴⁾;

having regard to the contribution to the draft opinion from Commission 5 (Social Policy, Public Health, Consumer Protection, Research and Tourism), adopted by that commission on 19 October 1999 (CdR 348/99 fin) (rapporteur: Mr Torchio, Mayor of Spineda, I/EPP);

having regard to the draft opinion adopted by Commission 2 on 4 May 2000 (CdR 132/2000 rev.) (rapporteur: Mr van Gelder, Queen's Commissioner in the Province of Zeeland, NL/EPP),

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 116, 14.4.1997, p. 46.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 93, 6.4.1999, p. 1.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 93, 6.4.1999, p. 9.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ L 160, 26.6.1999, p. 80.

unanimously adopted the following opinion at its 34th plenary session of 14 and 15 June 2000 (meeting of 14 June).

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, the task of promoting greater accessibility of rural areas is first and foremost a responsibility of the EU regions and the individual Member States, which should be based on partnership and cooperation between the EU institutions and the local and regional authorities.
 2. The accessibility of rural areas depends on the existence of sound infrastructure, including road and broadband networks. It is therefore important to maintain and develop the conditions for accessibility of rural areas in order to ensure that local and regional authorities have the resources to ensure the sustainable development of their region.
 3. In the European Union's policy it should be expressly stated that the promotion of the conditions for basic forms of recreational activity such as walking and cycling is directly linked with existing key aspects of the common agricultural policy such as rural development, sustainable development and conservation of the quality of the European landscape.
 4. The EU regions and Member States are advised to adopt a policy of opening up rural areas as much as possible to outdoor recreation and sustainable forms of tourism.
 5. A further opinion is to be drawn up focusing on three aspects for which legislative and regulatory changes have proved necessary, while fully respecting existing national legislation and the powers of local and regional authorities (in particular with regard to the marking out of routes):
 - a) In all cases where the legal provisions on access are unclear or ambiguous (as, in some countries, along the coast or along the banks of lakes and rivers), it should be laid down that accessibility is the general principle and that only compelling arguments on grounds of safety, ecology etc. can overrule it.
 - b) In most cases where paths and tracks are managed by (semi-)public bodies, public access will already be guaranteed. Where this is not the case, the general principle of 'public unless otherwise expressly stated for good reasons' should apply, as in the previous point.
 - c) In cases where paths and tracks are managed by individuals or private enterprises and 'right of way' is not defined by law, policy should be designed to encourage maximum additional use for recreational purposes.
 6. An overall assessment should be made of the consequences of implementing the Directive on conservation of wild birds (Directive 79/409/EEC), the Habitat Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC) and the Community Regulation on reafforestation (Regulation (EEC) No 2080/92), as well as any other applicable European legislation affecting the accessibility of rural areas.
 7. The regions are advised to include plans for networks of footpaths and cycling tracks in their regional development plans, and in the process also to consider through (inter-regional) route structures.
 8. With a view to the desired revitalisation of the quality of the European landscape, the European Union should promote the use of European structural funding (from, among others, the EAGGF, the ERDF and Leader) for further development of walking and cycling facilities, and all other types of outdoor leisure activity.
 9. In addition, sufficient resources should be made available to promote multi-functional farming and make farms suitable as accommodation for tourists, whether they be walkers, cyclists or horse-riders or taking part in any other type of outdoor leisure activity.
 10. In order to arrive at measures for the development of sustainable 'green' tourism in the regions, initiatives should be encouraged which aim to develop the basis for it in its various aspects (agriculture, nature, recreation/tourism). An important precondition for the proper functioning of these measures is the involvement of those working on the spot; the advantages of this bottom-up approach are obvious, and they fit in with the building of Europe on a basis of subsidiarity.
- Structures must be created and measures adopted to compensate for damage to the environment and to the harvest in rural areas, especially in ecologically sensitive regions.

Education in treating the environment with respect must go hand in hand with the progressive opening up of rural areas' accessibility.

Moreover it is interesting to note that the beauty and accessibility of rural areas are also used as selling points in tourism promotion campaigns, in particular through new communication technology (the Internet).

11. To ensure that constant attention is paid to this issue and to promote inter-regional exchanges of expertise and

experience, we recommend that the European Commission establish an annual 'best practice' award for the region which, through a model or innovative project, has shown that it is serious about implementing the foregoing recommendations. The European Commission should also be encouraged to publish a 'handbook of best practice'.

12. We recommend that the European Commission invite existing European umbrella organisations for walking, cycling and all other types of outdoor leisure activity to take part in the panel for this award.

Brussels, 14 June 2000.

*The President
of the Committee of the Regions*
Jos CHABERT

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the 'Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the interoperability of the trans-European conventional rail system'

(2000/C 317/07)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on integrating conventional rail systems and the proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the interoperability of the trans-European conventional rail system (COM(1999) 617 final — 1999/0252 (COD))⁽¹⁾;

having regard to the decision taken by the Council on 17 February 2000, under Article 156 and 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 the president of the Committee of the Regions of 17 February 2000 to direct Commission 3 (Trans-European Networks, Transport and Information Society) to draw up the relevant opinion;

having regard to its opinion of March 1998 on Trans-European Rail-Freight Freeways (CdR 346/97 fin)⁽²⁾;

having regard to its opinion of March 1999 on Intermodality and intermodal freight transport in the European Union (CdR 398/98 fin)⁽³⁾;

having regard to its opinion of March 1999 on Developing the Citizens' Network — Why good local and regional passenger transport is important, and how the European Commission is helping to bring it about (CdR 436/98 fin)⁽⁴⁾;

having regard to the draft opinion (CdR 94/2000 rev. 1) adopted by Commission 3 on 4 May 2000 (rapporteur: Mr Panettoni, President of the Union of Italian Provinces (I/PSE));

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 89 E, 28.3.2000, p. 11.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 180, 11.6.1998, p. 17.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 198, 14.7.1999, p. 21.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 198, 14.7.1999, p. 8.