

2.4. Finally, the ESC notes that the current proposal does not affect the proposal adopted on 20 June 2001. It has a wider scope, aims at ensuring that scarce capacity of slots at congested

airports is managed and used efficiently, albeit without modifying fundamentally the current system of slot allocation built around the so-called 'grandfather' or 'historical slots'.

Brussels, 21 March 2002.

*The President*  
*of the Economic and Social Committee*  
Göke FRERICHS

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**Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Decision No 1692/96/EC on Community guidelines for the development of a trans-European transport network'**

(COM(2001) 544 final — 2001/0229 (COD))

(2002/C 125/16)

On 14 November 2001, the Council decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 156 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the above-mentioned proposal.

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 26 February 2002. The rapporteur was Mr Kleemann.

At its 389th plenary session held on 20 and 21 March 2002 (meeting of 21 March) the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 54 votes to 0, with 5 abstentions.

## 1. Introduction

1.1. In its proposal the Commission is seeking to tighten up and modify the priorities of the trans-European network with a view to optimising network capacity by concentrating investments in areas with existing bottlenecks. Three projects have already been completed and the importance of certain rail and trans-alpine projects confirmed. Six new projects and new sections to two existing projects have been added.

1.2. The ESC has been involved in each development phase of the TEN and has from the outset fully supported the TEN blueprint and advocated clear criteria and appropriate encouragement.

## 2. General comments

2.1. The Gothenburg European Council referred to the need to shift transport from road to rail, water and public passenger

transport. The Commission proposal now on the table responds to this Council mandate.

2.2. Many factors are responsible for the rise in EU traffic levels, but the growth in car traffic — both work-related and private — plays a major part in the use of transport systems. On the one hand, traffic levels have risen considerably because of the need to commute between home and work, changes in consumer behaviour and the disproportionate growth in leisure travel. On the other hand, traffic density has increased greatly in recent years, with heavy lorries in many regions and conurbations. However, the globalisation of the economy, the increased functioning of the internal market, changes in production methods and the logistics associated with this contribute, among other things, to changes in the structure of the economy and inevitably generate increased traffic across all transport modes. With the accession of the applicant countries this will increasingly affect cross-border routes which, according to the Commission, are also currently the weakest points.

2.3. The ESC is convinced that environmental protection requirements must be incorporated into transport policy, but that appropriate environmental standards ensuring equal treatment should be laid down for all modes of transport. Up until now no consideration has been given to the current absence of environmental protection standards (e.g. exhaust standards for diesel motors in locomotives and ships comparable to those applying in road haulage), especially for new acquisitions.

2.4. Simply opening up new infrastructure is not enough. Consideration also has to be given to existing infrastructure and the scope to expand it. For new construction ventures, all Member States are faced with a key issue: modern law as it relates to area planning and land use designation must take account both of interests that require protection and of necessary infrastructure projects. Hence, a balance is needed, since residential areas adjacent to infrastructure have been the source of conflicts, and such situations should be avoided in the future. As part of the Community's environmental powers, the Commission should recommend that, throughout the EU, those responsible for land-use planning at regional level should in future plan industrial areas as far as possible in the catchment area of infrastructure and take care that the burdens of these are kept within limits in residential areas.

2.5. The Commission notes that over the last 10 years the excessive use of road haulage, the spectacular growth in air traffic and the defects — particularly the infrastructure — of a railway system unsuitable for goods traffic have contributed to a considerable overloading not only of the roads, but also of the railway system and of air space. Despite all the efforts made up to now, bottlenecks continue to exist in Europe. The most severely affected are the international traffic corridors where trans-European north-south traffic is channelled, and particularly the natural obstacles such as the Alps and the Pyrenees, the fringe areas of large conurbations and some frontier regions, particularly on the borders with the acceding countries. The ESC can only agree with these statements, and the recent accidents and subsequent tunnel closures in Switzerland and Austria have made north-south traffic much more difficult, overloaded alternative routes and had a detrimental impact on economic and social conditions, particularly in Italy. Swiss transport policy, with very long planning stages laid down by law, and the geographical difficulties of building cost-effective alternatives to the existing network over/through the Alps or of expanding existing routes, have meant that projects of this kind have not been carried out. Moreover, traffic flows that have been changed because of regional circumstances (e.g. the Yugoslavia crisis) and restrictions that have been created intentionally through transport policy (driving bans, diversions, etc.) have also exacerbated bottlenecks in the alpine region.

2.6. The ESC maintains that the last few years have been marked by major changes in behaviour.

2.6.1. In addition to the splitting-up of their operations into infrastructure management and the provision of services, the national railway companies have had to learn that their supply side must be improved and that their timetables must be geared to the needs of customer demand. Thanks to the rapid rise of information technology, the dominant economic thinking in Europe has become based on a division of labour and deconcentration over numerous locations (in line with the 'profit centre' idea).

2.6.2. The use of transport across the continent has increased because of diversified consumer behaviour (due to their being better informed) the further decline of large families based in one location, large out-of-town shopping centres, and the increasing depopulation of the countryside.

2.6.3. There never has been any alternative to roads as a means of providing local and comprehensive national coverage. There is no objective justification for blaming road transport firms, as customer-oriented service providers, for this situation. Rather it is different transport policies which, against this background, have failed to persuade transport users to follow their lead and make more use of the railways. The decline of warehousing in wholesaling and in industry has led to extreme time pressure in the transport sector and given a boost to road haulage because of its greater flexibility compared with the existing rail transport system.

2.7. The ESC agrees with the Commission's call to promote investments in trans-European transport routes reserved primarily for goods transport, consisting mainly of existing routes on which priority is given to goods trains or where only goods traffic is allowed. One can only endorse the Commission's arguments and proposals here.

2.8. The ESC would point out that account should also be taken of the transport of dangerous, extra large or extra heavy goods when planning and converting railway lines to predominantly goods traffic. This applies across the board, but in particular to tunnels and bridges. Circumventing heavily built-up areas could also minimise risks.

2.9. The more links there are between individual modes of transport, the more acceptance there is of other alternatives during decision-making. The changes suggested in Article 5 only partly take into account these considerations.

### 3. Specific comments

3.1. The ESC agrees with the Commission that the possibilities of making new capacity available by extending the road system are in part very limited. Only by traffic management and information systems can optimum use be made of the existing infrastructure. But that presupposes the existence of alternatives to steer traffic on to other routes, inasmuch as these are provided for in the relevant area plans.

3.2. Through an optimum use of infrastructure, the environmental nuisances caused in some regions by road traffic can be reduced. However, the ESC thinks care should be taken here to see whether the transport of goods by road should be judged more stringently, especially if one considers that:

3.2.1. different modes of transport are subject to very different emission limits;

3.2.2. with the exception of certain regions and conurbations, the proportion of road haulage to overall traffic is, in the main, small;

3.2.3. an appropriate cost-benefit assessment of road haulage has so far been neglected;

3.2.4. a large part of road haulage is distribution, and not long-distance, cross-border or transit traffic <sup>(1)</sup>;

3.2.5. with the establishment of the EURO 4 and 5 limits, sustainable development until 2008 at least has been ensured for lorry engine technology.

3.3. A fundamental change of mentality among road transport users is desirable in favour of multimodal transport, with the simultaneous promotion of the speed and cheapness of alternatives based on the principle of sustainability. A policy of simply raising the price of road transport is out of the question without any accompanying measures to counteract the negative economic impact, and other transport policy instruments must also be considered. Also, with such considerations, there would have to be guarantees that the fees, charges, etc. were paid by the consignor, with the consequence that such up front financial payments by the haulier would have to be set out in detail later on the invoice for the consignor.

3.4. For the ESC the basic question is whether the revision of the project list alone is sufficient, since many of the basic conditions have changed. This particularly applies to traffic to and from the applicant countries, even if a radical revision of the guidelines is planned for 2004.

3.5. The White Paper and the Commission proposal make little distinction between goods and passenger traffic. Thus there are no remarks on the fact that a rail link would enable airports to transport many goods for their own operation: not so much air freight, which must always be delivered and/or fetched by road because of the speed required, but rather fuel, spare parts, equipment, food, commercial goods, etc.

3.6. The ESC agrees with the changes and extensions in Article 10 concerning the rail network, whereby not only air transport services but also shipping and the road network would be included in the interests of an efficient infrastructure.

3.7. Intelligent traffic systems such as traffic management systems and systems for the transfer of information to the user, as well as satellite navigation and positioning systems, offer considerable possibilities for the improvement of network capacity and security. The action of the Community must therefore aim at achieving a maximum of technical interoperability of all systems. For competitive reasons therefore, firm support should be provided for systems for all modes of transport, such as Galileo (satellite and radio navigation) or the railway traffic management system (ERTMS). The ESC endorses such support.

3.8. The ESC agrees with the test criteria and methods for selecting new projects used by the Commission. This also applies to the examination of alternatives. It is recommended that the Commission set concrete goals for these new projects, such as capacity, safety and quality of service.

3.9. The ESC can also agree with the amending and adapting and/or updating of maps. However, the connections/interfaces for linking with the traffic networks of the acceding countries, which lie in the border areas of these countries, should be specified.

3.10. Basically, the ESC welcomes a strategic environmental compatibility test. It must be remembered that these tests should not prevent intended or planned projects by placing subjective individual interests above the overall social and economic benefits involved. In order to guarantee efficient application, it is necessary to establish clearly defined deadlines. Additional guides for implementation are currently being developed by the Commission.

3.11. A shift in traffic and a new balance between the different modes of transport along the lines envisaged by the Gothenburg European Council can only succeed if rail and shipping companies and operators offer high-quality, demanded services.

<sup>(1)</sup> EU energy and transport in figures — Statistical pocket book 2001, p. 132, distance classes per cent.

#### 4. Conclusions

4.1. The revision of the guidelines essentially puts the emphasis on measures in the railway sector, and intermodal transport, which do, however, urgently require major investment. Basically, the Committee backs the measures concerned, despite the fact that other transport modes have a more important position within the transport economy. In this connection, attention is drawn to connecting Europe's islands to the TEN<sup>(1)</sup> and to possible infrastructure expansion.

4.2. Insofar as the Commission White Paper on European transport policy calls for an integrated approach, the ESC feels that more weight should be put in the proposal as a whole on combining measures. This particularly applies where different modes of transport can offer their services on parallel routes (coastal roads versus coastal shipping and rail traffic).

4.3. As some of the countries bordering on the Community are applying for accession, the ESC feels that account should be taken of these traffic links in Member States' spatial and project planning.

4.4. The ESC feels that bottlenecks, which continue to exist, can only be eliminated or avoided over time through joint efforts, decisions, measures and approaches. The essentials of the Commission's proposals should also be supported by the Member States as part of a common European transport and infrastructure policy.

4.5. The ESC supports the Commission's strategy, based on the guidelines laid down in Essen in 1994, of focusing on the

abolition of existing bottlenecks on the major transport routes, and only implementing a limited number of new projects. Even if the Commission is planning a fundamental revision of the guidelines in 2004, the ESC thinks that links with the accession candidates should be given more consideration in the present proposal, because plans have to be made now. The expected increases in capacity must be given appropriate consideration in all modes of transport.

4.6. Since, in the last analysis, the biggest bottlenecks are to be found in terminals, which serve as transshipment areas for goods and as rail connections, public investments by the Member States to upgrade marshalling yards and transshipment facilities can play an important role in capacity development. In this connection it is important not to overlook suitable and efficient links with other modes of transport. Only then can terminals fulfil their distributor function.

4.7. The ESC wonders whether the projects should not be restructured in the light of more recent political circumstances (accession candidates). This applies in particular to Community funding for transport networks outside the EU (i.e. the candidate countries) in order to close any gaps in the future network<sup>(2)</sup>. Our corridors only concern the current EU and offer hardly any cross connections to and over the territories of the applicant countries, which could provide diversions around problem areas like the Alps. In this respect the White Paper states that: 'The lack of efficient transport infrastructure networks to cope with this anticipated growth in movements is still greatly underestimated. And yet that infrastructure is a key element of the strategy for the economic development of the candidate countries and their integration into the internal market.' The ESC is of the same opinion, so attention should be paid to these considerations in further discussions on the guidelines.

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<sup>(1)</sup> See the ESC own-initiative opinion currently in the pipeline on 'The extension of the trans-European networks to the island regions of Europe' (TEN 086).

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<sup>(2)</sup> Commission Communication COM(2001) 437 of 25 July 2001 deals with the connection of transport networks in the applicant countries to the TEN.

Brussels, 21 March 2002.

*The President*  
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