

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions — ‘Green Paper TEN-T: A policy review’

(2010/C 79/05)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- calls on Member States to reverse the drastic TEN-T budget cutbacks during the course of the 2009/2010 mid-term review of the Financial Perspectives;
- would like to restrict the Trans-European Transport Network to transport axes that contribute significantly to the strategic objectives of the European Union, particularly cohesion policy, over the long-term (the ‘principal networks’) and as part of a two-level TEN-T structure with a comprehensive TEN-T network and a core network; the maintenance of a comprehensive network is the only opportunity for outlying regions without priority projects to benefit from transport infrastructure services funded by the EU, thus guaranteeing accessibility for all regions;
- considers that the TEN-T network should in particular include infrastructure surrounding major cities, in order to restrict the number of routes shared by long-distance traffic and everyday peri-urban traffic also seeking alternatives through non-congested areas;
- believes that when it comes to the completion of very large projects the European contribution should be contractualised as part of global financial plans. This is not possible under current procedures for allocating European subsidies, which are limited to a budgetary period of seven years (the completion period for very large projects is longer);
- suggests that on the basis of the redefined TEN-T, ‘programme contracts’ between the EU and each Member State should be signed, setting out mutual commitments regarding financing and timetables for completion. These programme contracts should cover not only the infrastructure that is part of the TEN-T, but also secondary infrastructure that States (or Regions) would commit to completing in order to secure the smooth running of the principal networks.

Rapporteur: Jean-Michel Daclin, Deputy Mayor of Lyon (FR/PES)

Reference document

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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I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

On the foundations on which the future TEN-T policy should rest

1. warmly welcomes the in-depth review of TEN-T policy, which would appear necessary in the light of the major delays suffered in the completion of the network defined in 1996 and the constraints on the European transport budget, and notes that the financial crisis makes it all the more necessary to optimise the investments to be made as part of TEN-T;
2. emphasises that in the current economic crisis, TEN-T development and the integration of transport in the EU and its neighbouring countries constitute considerable stakes for ensuring the internal market's long-term viability and territorial, economic and social cohesion in the EU; therefore calls on Member States to reverse the drastic TEN-T budget cutbacks during the course of the 2009/2010 mid-term review of the Financial Perspectives;
3. notes that this opinion is an important addition to the opinions it has previously adopted, in particular those on greening the transport sector and on urban mobility;
4. would draw the Commission's attention to the fact that the development of transport infrastructure is inextricably linked with the other two strands of transport policy: policy on traffic charging and regulation (for instance under the Eurovignette directive) and the improvements in transport efficiency, quality and safety (for instance through the development of rail interoperability); and therefore recommends that the Commission develop these three strands coherently and simultaneously;
5. hopes that greater attention will be given to the objectives of sustainable development and environmental protection and thus that TEN-T policy will nurture more environmentally-friendly modes of transport (rail, sea and river transport);
6. proposes that specific attention be given to the existence of environmentally sensitive areas such as coastal and mountain areas, where special measures should be taken to encourage a switch from road haulage to rail or to sea motorways;
7. regrets that the Green Paper does not do more to highlight the importance of transport in European regional planning and, in full accordance with the EU objective of territorial cohesion,

recalls that one of the basic objectives of TEN-T is to contribute to a better balance between the regions by enabling the free movement of people and goods, in particular between more remote or less developed regions and major European economic centres in order to give these regions a much-needed economic boost and, in the case of the outermost regions, taking account of their right to accessibility;

On network planning

8. would like to restrict the Trans-European Transport Network to transport axes that contribute significantly to the strategic objectives of the European Union, particularly cohesion policy, over the long-term (the 'principal networks') and as part of a two-level TEN-T structure with a comprehensive TEN-T network and a core network;
9. takes the view that, in the case of a comprehensive TEN-T network based on agreed methods and general principles at Community level, a flexible system should be put in place so that different parts or components of the network (new ports, airports, rail connections, etc.) can be quickly and effectively integrated into the TEN-T network;
10. considers it inevitable that a distinction be drawn between freight and passenger transport as they differ in purpose and nature, and hopes to see the priorities of these two types of network defined more clearly where appropriate (currently decisions often favour passenger transport); believes that the scarcity of funding means that priorities need to be set in developing the overall TEN-T network, and that resources should be targeted at removing bottlenecks;
11. is of the opinion that making this distinction would not preclude close coordination in the definition and implementation of the two networks or the possibility of freight and passenger functions sharing the same infrastructure, either temporarily or permanently provided needs in terms of goods and passengers services are met;
12. recommends that the trans-European 'principal networks' for freight and passengers incorporate the current 'priority projects' which could be expanded to include other projects and all the infrastructure necessary to ensure continuity in circulation (including small scale infrastructure enabling a rapid improvement in traffic effectiveness, quality and safety) thanks to which corridors can be developed that reflect what the public wants;

13. considers that the redefined TEN-T network should also encompass the transport nodes located on these principal networks and which are particularly important for the cohesion and economy of the EU's regions, as these nodes provide considerable added value, particularly because they are designed to be multi-modal; transport nodes are the main source of congestion and other failings in efficiency; the TEN-T network should in particular include infrastructure surrounding major cities, in order to restrict the number of routes shared by long-distance traffic and everyday peri-urban traffic also seeking alternatives through non-congested areas;

14. judges it important that the TEN-T network be defined according to a logic of intermodality and thus be extended to the major hubs for connections and logistics (stations, airports, ports, intermodal terminals) as well as to secondary infrastructure serving these hubs and linking them to the principal networks; it is also worth bearing in mind here the maritime role of certain land corridors as a basic axis for the priority network for freight transport by rail linked to sea transport via the rail connection with the main intermodal transport nodes (logistics platforms and ports);

15. also considers it essential that ports which are of strategic importance for Europe, especially those linked to European multimodal platforms which handle the greater part of European external trade and which can play a greater role in terms of intra-EU trade, be connected efficiently to inland areas by the TEN-T rail and river network and recommends the development of Motorways of the Sea, which constitute a flexible, environmentally friendly alternative facilitating the integration of remote and peripheral areas; rail and river transport should be given priority in connections between European sea ports and their hinterlands;

16. insists on the need to involve cities and regional and local authorities closely in defining the TEN-T network and its priorities, particularly in order to ensure consistency with local and regional planning and especially when defining transport hubs and secondary infrastructure as, while city and regional growth depends largely on transport infrastructure, the result is that cities and regions shoulder certain costs and suffer various impacts;

17. notes that unlike planning based on principal networks, the scope of the current 'comprehensive network' hinders the effective development of TEN-T; against this backdrop, would welcome limiting the comprehensive network to the stringent application of legislative measures on interoperability, safety and cohesion funds; notes that the maintenance of a comprehensive network is the only opportunity for outlying regions without priority projects to benefit from transport infrastructure services funded by the EU, thus guaranteeing accessibility for all regions; the comprehensive network could be subject to a stringent assessment of clearly defined EU 'added value criteria';

18. would welcome an ambitious policy to develop 'intelligent' intermodal and interoperable systems for user interfaces and information, as this could make a major contribution to passenger and freight transport efficiency; and, in particular, recommends putting in place an integrated ticketing system in the area of international rail passenger transport;

19. recommends continuing work on standardising technical provisions (for instance the standards already adopted in rail transport) and operating systems for transport in order to provide a coherent framework for the various national infrastructures and to enable interoperability between local transport systems and standards but without imposing any particular standards on local and regional transport authorities;

20. calls for clarification and precisions regarding what the Green Paper refers to as the 'conceptual pillar' as the current definition is too vague and makes it impossible to express an opinion;

On the implementation of TEN-T policy

21. believes it is necessary to focus European subsidies on a more limited number of operations, primarily on the major transnational projects, which often suffer as a result of governments favouring strictly national projects, and then on operations enabling rapid improvements in the quality and safety of exchanges and environmental sustainability; any eventual decision on that front should be supported by the rigorous application of 'EU added value criteria'; in this connection, the application of co-financing and other supporting measures must have absolute competitive neutrality. Demonstration of this should form an integral part of an approval procedure;

22. welcomes the adoption at European level of socio-economic evaluation methods enabling comparisons between projects to be made on a harmonised basis so as to evaluate their 'European added value';

23. nevertheless draws the Commission's attention to the dangers of allocating European financing on this basis alone, as socio-economic evaluation methods tend to apply set criteria and cannot take all the factors in the decision into account, particularly when it comes to regional planning, territorial cohesion and accessibility;

24. stresses the need for the Guidelines to include provisions that will ensure that each Member State defines a structure whereby the local and regional bodies that are legally responsible for transport planning and network management are fully involved in the process of defining and implementing the TEN-T guidelines as the best way to ensure the harmonious development of local, regional, national and TEN-T networks;

25. believes that to secure more environmentally-sound rail, maritime and river networks it is essential to set up a favourable tariff and regulatory framework, and hopes therefore that an ambitious policy will be implemented in this area not least by internalising external costs or through European support for freight undertakings to use sustainable modes such as rail or maritime transport (as is the case for the Ecobonus);

26. considers it essential that implementation of the TEN-T network be accompanied by measures to improve the efficiency and quality of transport, in particular to remove technical and regulatory obstacles to crossing borders; though inexpensive, these measures can have very significant results;

27. notes that the opposition of local people or local authorities to certain infrastructure projects, often because of the disruption they entail, can lead to significant delays and additional costs;

28. therefore suggests extending European financing to cover measures which the Member States and regional authorities could deploy after public consultation in order to prepare local areas to welcome major projects (such as training the local labour force, worker accommodation, adjustment of the local economic fabric to the needs of the projects, etc.) which would enable these sites to also be sources of positive knock-on effects for local areas;

29. also suggests that European financing should be extended to certain accompanying investments, with a view to addressing environmental constraints more effectively;

30. believes that when it comes to the completion of very large projects the European contribution should be contractualised as part of global financial plans. This is not possible under current procedures for allocating European subsidies, which are limited to a budgetary period of seven years (the completion period for very large projects is longer);

31. suggests that on the basis of the redefined TEN-T, 'programme contracts' between the EU and each Member State should be signed, setting out mutual commitments regarding financing and timetables for completion. These programme contracts should cover not only the infrastructure that is part of the TEN-T, but also secondary infrastructure that States (or Regions) would commit to completing in order to secure the smooth running of the principal network;

32. notes that the financing tools set up by the European Union (e.g., loan guarantees and risk capital) are well suited to projects where the private sector takes commercial risks, particularly for road projects, where the financial input of the private sector can be major (these projects can generally be carried out under a licence);

33. notes, on the other hand, that they are ill-suited to rail port and intermodal freight projects which more often than not do not allow the commercial risk to be passed onto the private sector and therefore receive only marginal financial support from the private sector;

34. believes that eurobonds issues would enable priority projects to be completed more rapidly, providing they enable the Community share in the financing to be increased;

35. believes that, in spite of their contractual complexity, certain major projects can benefit from public-private partnerships, first because they enable public subsidies to be paced out, and second by taking advantage of the private sector's operational experience. This type of set-up does not however alter the balance of the economic situation over the medium-term;

36. believes that clarification of EU rules on public-private partnerships would make it easier to develop this type of set-up;

37. welcomes the extension of the role of the European coordinators, currently responsible for priority projects only, to include the 'principal networks' of the redefined TEN-T;

38. suggests that the coordinators should also play a part in defining and implementing measures with a view to improving transport efficiency, quality and safety, as is already the case for certain priority projects;

39. believes that another type of coordination exists, that could be called 'macro-zone coordination'. This would involve dividing up the EU into zones with similar features and conditions, which would make it easier for States that are close to one another to work together. It would also facilitate coordination with regard to extensive corridors, for which the regions of origin and destination do not have much in common.

Brussels, 7 October 2009

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