Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions — A European Strategy for Low-Emission Mobility

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS (CoR)

1.   welcomes the fact that the current strategy is a multidisciplinary, comprehensive approach that includes sociological and economic aspects, innovations in the energy, infrastructure and digital sectors, industrial competitiveness and skills development;

2.   endorses the objectives of the strategy, which had already been set out in the 2011 White Paper ([1]), namely to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transport by at least 60 % compared to 1990;

3.   nevertheless, suggests that the strategy, in accordance with the 2011 White Paper, should take into account the progress made from 2011 onwards in terms of improving the transport system's efficiency and the current EU 2030 energy and climate policy framework as well as the commitments made by the EU in the context of the 2015 Paris agreement;

OPTIMISING THE TRANSPORT SYSTEM AND IMPROVING ITS EFFICIENCY

Digital mobility solutions

4.   emphasises that by harnessing the potential of digital technologies it will be possible to optimise transportation and set up a multimodal trans-European transport (TEN-T) network. The prerequisites are intelligent transport systems (ITSs) and infrastructure. It is also important to take account of ecosystems reflecting local environmental characteristics and ensure the involvement of LRAs in the implementation phase;

5.   highlights that European cities and regions, by playing an active role in establishing smart telecommunications and transport infrastructure, may ensure the efficient use of connected and automated vehicles along the corridors of the TEN-T network which crosses the borders and territories of the Member States within urban areas in delivery of SUMPS and regional sustainable transport master plans;

6.   acknowledges that IT solutions shape transport business models and patterns. LRAs should apply easy to use, inclusive IT solutions in order to deploy ITSs in their 'smart city' and area mobility developments;

7.   draws attention to the need for simplified databases and interconnection among them by proposing development of European standards which can facilitate interoperability of data, services and technical solutions at all levels. This data should be provided and guaranteed by the relevant regional transport authorities within a single data compression system;

Fair and efficient transport pricing

8.   considers that LRAs have significant legal and financial competences in their own right (e.g. using parking spaces, bus lanes, procurement benefits, 'green' registration plates or tariff reductions on tolls) that can influence consumer preferences and choices, encouraging the use of alternative fuel vehicles. It would warn the Commission that these tools are restricted

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([1])   White paper — Roadmap to a Single European Transport Area — Towards a competitive and resource efficient transport system. Brussels, 28 March 2011, COM(2011) 144 final.

by the conditions imposed on the use of the ESI Funds as they do not allow subsidies to be granted for the renewal of private vehicle fleets. The effect of this is that renovation is delayed and opportunities for transport efficiency and competitiveness and better air quality in cities, by means of energy and environmental improvements, for example in taxi services or last mile deliveries, are being missed;

9. highlights that, for pricing purposes, information on transport available from different mobility-related sources must be harmonised. Integrated ticketing still faces obstacles against its wider use as modes of public transport differ in terms of profitability. The cost of introducing integrated pricing may decrease or turn the overall financial profits of a given transport mode into overall financial losses;

10. warns that despite the considerable efforts and resources that have been mobilised to support public and multimodal transport, information available to passengers using multimodal transport is entirely inadequate. The situation is even worse with regard to ticketing services. This is not because it would be impossible from a technical point of view to provide detailed and user-friendly information on multimodal transport or services, or to provide users with information on ticketing; rather, it is due to the unwillingness of public transport operators to provide information and services. The EU should therefore pass legislation making it mandatory to publish timetables and other travel information and to make this information fully accessible to all EU citizens in such a way that they can all use it as easily and effectively as possible; draws attention in this connection to the European Committee of the Regions opinion on Multimodal travel information, planning and ticketing services, CdR 4895/2014;

11. all transport modes should contribute, in proportion with the amount they pollute, to the external costs that they cause, following the polluter pays principle;

12. points out that power grids, electricity storage, trade, and the management of public infrastructure will all need to be modernised, along with transport rules and vehicle taxation, to be properly equipped for new and innovative transportation modes, including battery or hydrogen fuel cell. In this regard, interoperable and easy payment solutions for charging these kinds of electric vehicle are also recommended;

13. draws attention to the fact that the tax exemption system applied to aviation fuel and international flight tickets represents a clear market distortion in the transport sector. Calls for EU Member States to discuss the existing international fuel taxation system with the International Civil Aviation Organisation so as to ensure consistency with international climate change commitments, without prejudice to recognition of the specific features and interests of outermost regions;

Promoting multimodality

14. encourages, in the context of SUMPs, multimodality and coordinated use of low- or zero-emission urban-regional transport and logistics, and rail, maritime and river transport. In particular the shift from road transport to other, lower emissions modes would have significant potential in terms of lowering emissions. In any case, modal shift solutions involving low-emission mobility should receive high priority, for instance, by reconsidering existing hidden or open subsidies to road transport;

15. calls for a new approach to short sea shipping by developing the use of ecological bonus schemes and considering motorways of the sea as infrastructures which should be subject to an adapted approach in relation to state aid controls. This approach is particularly crucial for areas which remain peripheral to European transport corridors;

16. in this regard, specific thought should be given to urban nodes and logistic platforms as defined by the TEN-T (basic and general network) and by the 2013 CEF Regulation, given their role as a cornerstone of sustainable and intermodal mobility at Member State, regional and EU level. It is therefore proposed that a debate on this issue be held in the various European forums on multimodal corridors where the question of nodes is specifically addressed;

17. supports the EU playing an active role in the International Civil Aviation Organisation and the International Maritime Organisation to reduce emissions of the maritime and aviation sectors. The development and deployment of new, lower emission technologies should be promoted;

SCALING UP THE USE OF LOW-EMISSION ALTERNATIVE ENERGY FOR TRANSPORT

An effective framework for low-emission alternative energy

18.   encourages, by supporting the development of the energy sector, the introduction of alternative energy sources in transport, paving the way to 'zero-emissions' transport;

19.   underlines that Member States, regions and municipalities are encouraged to invest in alternative energy for transport through non-reimbursable grants under the cohesion policy, while complying with the principle of technological neutrality laid down by Directive 2014/94/EU on alternative fuels infrastructure;

20.   advocates a broader uptake of advanced renewable biofuels that are produced in an environmentally friendly manner and generate lower carbon emissions than traditional fossil fuels, in order to decarbonise the transport sector. In this connection, non-food (synthetic) or feed-based biofuels should be given priority. The expected positive impacts are work opportunities and job creation in rural and less developed areas, in addition to producing extra economic value added. As advanced biofuels are currently not considered competitive sources of energy without support, their production should be subsidised to compete with fossil fuels or food-based biofuels;

21.   points out that the Directive on the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure ([2]) has already set out mandatory requirements regarding the use of electricity, natural gas and hydrogen to fuel vehicles;

22.   stresses that alternative energies, biomethane and biofuels currently available will partly replace conventional diesel- or petrol-powered vehicles. This enhances energy security by reducing demand for conventional fuels;

23.   calls for a widely acceptable definition of biofuels and the adoption, in connection with this, of a set of criteria on sustainability and carbon dioxide reduction that would boost legal certainty, and support law enforcement and investment decision-making in production and use of biofuels;

24.   advises that it is important to take into account specific national, regional and local situations, and the different raw materials available locally and regionally. The total energy balance (including fuel production) should be taken into account when regulating use of alternative fuels from renewable resources;

25.   emphasises that from a regional and local point of view the ideal low emission alternative energy should be locally produced, and stored and used/consumed locally, too. Producing low emission alternative energy and storing it for local consumption is even more important for remote regions such as islands and the outermost regions, in order to reduce their external dependency;

The roll-out of infrastructure for alternative fuels

26.   stresses that low- or zero-emission mobility is expected to revolutionise transport in terms of networks, vehicles and fuels. The prerequisite of that is cheap, accessible energy and fuels. In addition to electric and hydrogen engines, which offer a non-polluting option, advanced biofuels which do not compete with foodstuff production and are produced in an environmentally friendly manner have an important role to play in the achievement of the emission reduction targets. Hence the focus should be mainly, but not exclusively, on developing affordable charging infrastructure for electric and hydrogen fuel cell vehicles, given the gas's fuel function and storage capacity. However, support should also be given — in the form of financial incentives — to low emission technologies using, for example, advanced biofuels;

27.   recommends that binding deadlines be set for all levels of public administration by which tenders for the purchase of new vehicles for their fleets and public transport service concessions must be exclusively for alternative energy vehicles;

([2])   Directive 2014/94/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2014 on the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure.

28.   calls for the need for a strategy to promote the use of LNG in maritime transport and trade by strengthening support for the adaptation of port infrastructures and by developing a general approach to innovation and financing equipment for ships enabling the use of LNG and methanol produced from the processing of waste;

29.   advocates the need for dock electrification in order to reduce CO_2 emissions from ships moored in port with their engines switched on, which accounts for a large share of pollution in port cities;

30.   notes that electric transportation and electric recharging infrastructure for recharging electric battery or hydrogen fuel cell vehicles could be deployed very quickly in urban areas and conurbations where local authorities deem it appropriate. Electric transportation infrastructure needs to be constructed along the strategic routes linking regions of Europe as cross-border electric mobility (e-mobility) may overcome internal market fragmentation. Most European islands, for example, represent an ideal location for e-mobility on account of their size. Appropriate deployment of recharging infrastructure could quickly contribute to the large-scale take up of electric mobility in these regions;

31.   stresses that locally produced and stored electric energy could provide a stable and inexpensive fuel source to accelerate the transition to low-emission e-mobility. The gradual roll-out of such mobility can address its competitive disadvantage compared to conventional fuels. Decentralised electricity storage integrated into the grid can offer additional services to the electricity system such as helping to overcome the mismatch between the energy supply from renewable sources and the demand for energy at periods of high and low demand or helping to regulate frequency. To this end, it is also necessary to facilitate the active involvement of consumers in managing the electricity system, for example through demand aggregators, removing existing legislative barriers;

Interoperability and standardisation for electric mobility

32.   shares the EC's view on introducing common technical and technological standards, taking into account the needs of different Member States and regions. Standardisation will drive interoperability between local transport systems within individual regions and between different regions;

33.   is concerned that the development of national implementation plans for the roll out of alternative fuels infrastructure is being done, in most Member States, without the active contribution of the competent regional and local authorities in spite of these plans being a clear case where multilevel governance is needed, and that plans to promote e-mobility are receiving insufficient political and budgetary support;

34.   points out that electric vehicle charging stations are to be standardised and calls on the EC to support the roll-out of electric charging stations by developing standards enabling integration of fuelling stations into existing buildings/facilities in keeping with the current legislation in each country;

MOVING TOWARDS ZERO-EMISSION VEHICLES

Improvements in vehicle testing to regain consumer trust

35.   welcomes the recent arrangements for measuring and verifying emissions of harmful substances from vehicles, so as to ensure that the environmental performance of vehicles is transparent and reliable. This will help to implement limits on air pollutant emissions and increase consumer confidence. Emission threshold values for passenger cars and light commercial vehicles must be appropriate to ensure the attainment of the objectives and agreements concerning emissions of pollutants and human health;

36.   supports the drafting of new guidelines on vehicle labelling, as this helps avoid misleading consumers. Rules on how values measured via the new Worldwide Harmonised Light Vehicles Test Procedures (WLTP) and the old procedure (New European Driving Cycle — NEDC) need to be clarified and should be displayed. Amending not only the guidelines, but also the Directive on labelling (³), should be considered. Similarly, the Directive on the Promotion of Clean and Energy Efficient

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(³)   Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council — Review of Directive 2010/30/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 May 2010 on the indication by labelling and standard product information of the consumption of energy and other resources by energy-related products. Brussels, 15 July 2015, COM(2015) 345 final.

Road Transport Vehicles (⁴) needs to be overhauled to keep up with the latest technical developments;

Post-2020 strategy for cars and vans

37.   stresses that measures encouraging the introduction of e-mobility should be established with quantitative parameters and be time-bound in order to ensure that the transition takes place;

Post-2020 strategy for lorries, buses and coaches

38.   considers that public transport should continue to gain ground on private cars and therefore proposes that the transition towards e-mobility and the use of other fuels considered by the EU to be alternatives to petroleum derivatives be accelerated by prioritising production and use of electric buses and trams, including those powered by hydrogen fuel cells, together with the use of natural gas for buses and coaches, thus reducing carbon dioxide emissions from buses. With regard to long-distance freight transport, proposes that the transition of lorry fleets from diesel to natural gas be speeded up, as this is the only fuel capable of replacing diesel, with almost zero polluting emissions and less carbon content than diesel;

39.   welcomes efforts by the EC to promote the Clean Bus Deployment Initiative in the EU, with a view to supporting better information exchange and market scale by providing a platform for cities, regions, operators and manufacturers. It strengthens the confidence of European bus manufacturers in the future demand for clean, alternatively fuelled buses, makes better use of forthcoming public tenders and is more effective at seeking financing solutions for larger tenders through e.g. the European Investment Bank;

40.   thinks it necessary to increase EU aid intensity, to improve synergy among the financial resources from the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) and the European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds, and to make use of subsidies. This would facilitate the rapid replacement of current, polluting public transport fleets and ensure the best use of all available EU funding;

Air transport and track-based transport

41.   emphasises the advantages of track-based modes of transport operated using renewable electric energy or alternative fuels, provided they are economically sustainable;

42.   points out that the necessary infrastructure must be put in place both locally and regionally, in those regions where rail is less developed, so that they can make use of rail transport under the same conditions as the rest of the Member States with a view to creating a Single European Railway Area;

AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR LOW-EMISSION MOBILITY

Energy Union: linking the transport and energy systems

43.   is pleased to note that the strategy is considered as a good step within the 2030 climate and energy framework adopted by the Council of the EU on 23-24 October 2014 (⁵), and with the Paris Agreement adopted on 12 December 2015 at the 21st Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (⁶), by linking two major players within the EU: transport on the demand side, and key players in the field of energy production and transmission on the supply side;

(⁴)   Directive 2009/33/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2009 on the promotion of clean and energy-efficient road transport vehicles. Directive 2009/33/EC.
(⁵)   Conclusions of the European Council (23-24 October 2014). Brussels, 24 October 2014, EUCO 169/14.
(⁶)   Paris COP21 agreement, 30 November-11 December 2015.

44.   considers that the Clean Energy for All Europeans package (⁷) is part of EU's efforts to: lead the way towards smarter and cleaner energy for all, support economic growth, investment and technological leadership, create new workplaces and improve citizens' welfare in EU regions and cities;

Research, innovation and competitiveness

45.   considers that e-mobility is one of the driving forces for innovation and technological development, having immediate benefits and playing a key role in reducing environmental impact;

46.   believes that the transition to low-carbon transport can be achieved primarily through regional and cohesion policy. By investing in research and innovation, regions and municipalities can support low-emission renewable energies, smart grids and sustainable urban transport;

47.   supports capitalising on the results of the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (H2020) for more innovative low-emission mobility solutions involving services/investments;

48.   encourages the development of innovative technologies for LNG tanks in ships and passenger coaches to optimise the efficiency of storage of this substitute fuel and calls for the financing of demonstration on freight and passenger vessels and long-distance passenger coaches to this end;

49.   also encourages the development of innovative technologies enabling the use of biofuels such as methanol which is produced from the processing of waste, including in the engines of cargo and passenger ships and therefore calls for funding for this;

50.   also calls for funding for dock electrification, and above all, a binding regulatory framework that applies in all EU ports;

Digital technologies: Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS), connected and self-conducting vehicles

51.   notes that IT solutions promote mobility based on the combined use of all modes of transport for passengers and freight (e.g. integrated ticketing and toll systems, intermodal freight transport documents, electronic route planning, real-time passenger information, etc.);

52.   notes that the emergence of connected and automated (self-conducting) vehicles using digital technology may offer many opportunities for tackling the negative effects of transport and for providing public transport in more sparsely populated areas; calls strongly for measures on connected and automated driving to be implemented, in accordance with the Amsterdam Declaration (⁸); welcomes the adoption of the EU strategy on cooperative intelligent transport systems on 30 November 2016 in this regard (⁹); calls in this connection for a more coherent vision of innovative sustainable transport developments and for stronger links between the Commission's various closely related work packages and communication concerning them;

53.   stresses that European regions want to be involved in establishing smart telecommunications and transport infrastructure. By doing so, connected and automated vehicles can be used efficiently and without hindrance along the corridors of TEN-T, and in urban and rural regions;

54.   emphasises that the proportionality and subsidiarity principles should empower LRAs to decide if and how to deploy ITSs and clean vehicles, as recognised by the EU Urban Mobility Action Plan, to decrease their transport emission and congestion problems, and to promote social inclusion;

(⁷)   Clean Energy for All Europeans — unlocking Europe's growth potential. EC Press Release database. http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-16-4009_en.htm
(⁸)   Declaration of Amsterdam — Cooperation in the field of connected and automated driving, 14-15 April 2016.
(⁹)   Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions a European strategy on cooperative Intelligent Transport Systems, a milestone towards cooperative, connected and automated mobility, Brussels, 30.11.2016 COM(2016) 766 final.

Skills

55.   recognises that the shift towards low-emission mobility creates challenges for the labour market, and therefore it is a priority to ensure that the workforce is retrained for new jobs. Despite high unemployment rates, there is a shortage of staff in many important areas of the transport sector as result of a lack of digital skills;

56.   regrets that the proposals set out in the previous 2009 communication on urban mobility as regards local authorities developing sustainable urban mobility plans (SUMPs) are not included in the current communication. Therefore highlights the need to make it clear, both within this strategy and in the initiatives and acts implementing it, that the integrated planning of cities is a key factor in developing sustainable mobility, including through the design and implementation of sustainable urban mobility plans;

57.   stresses the importance of dual training systems, proposes intensive exchange of experience between EU regions on good practices in the area of low-emission mobility, involving vocational education and businesses;

Investment

58.   welcomes the fact that innovation and development of infrastructure are at the heart of the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) objectives for incentivising combined (public-private) investments for transport and infrastructure. EFSI, in combination with non-reimbursable grants from the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), could provide for more intensive participation of local and regional levels in such projects, be they on a small or large scale;

59.   proposes increasing the amount and share of funds for low-emission transport in Horizon 2020, as well as in the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), when planning the next Multiannual Financial Framework. CEF should be further promoted as it offers considerable leverage: every euro of CEF grant spent generates EUR 3-3,5 in low-emission transport investment;

60.   points out that public-private partnership-based developments, and those carried out by public authorities, in cities and regions could provide the necessary leverage for the effective funding and operation of low-emission mobility solutions; also proposes that the use of EFSI and ESIF for local, innovative and low-emission transport solutions should be prioritised. Non-reimbursable grants should be made available for the above purposes in the post-2020 Strategic Reference Framework;

61.   highlights that LRAs have a key role in stimulating local energy production, as well as in integrated and intelligent energy grids. ESIF should facilitate necessary investments through non-reimbursable grants, primarily in the less developed EU regions which lag most behind;

62.   notes that the Investment Plan for Europe also provides public financing for low-emission transport projects and smart grids between early 2015 and the end of 2017;

Action by cities

63.   proposes that urban and interurban planning practices of European towns and cities should, within SUMPs, include the designation of areas for low-emission transport and mobility. Active transport (cycling and walking), public passenger transport solutions, car sharing and pooling should be given preference in urban planning; therefore calls for a forward-thinking EU transport investment policy, that should improve public health and that invests, with full consideration of the Paris Agreement at COP 21, at least 10 % of the EU's transport funds in cycling in those regions where oreographical conditions allow;

64.   proposes prior study of the mobility generated by urban and regional planning in metropolitan areas. The density of cities and their metropolitan areas needs to be increased in order firstly, to reduce the need for movements by motor vehicle by bringing services closer to the population and secondly, to enable improvement of public transport networks, by boosting their social and economic efficiency and their use;

65. stresses that spatial planning is a very important element in low-emission mobility. It is settlement structure and the design of the urban environment that provide the topographical conditions enabling low emission mobility to develop over the long term. It is recommended, where the LRAs have spatial planning powers under the Member States' legal or constitutional systems, that their regional, supramunicipal or metropolitan operational plans include initiatives of this type;

66. acknowledges that cycling, in accordance with the CoR opinion on 'An EU roadmap for cycling' ([10]), should be strengthened as a transport mode by increasing the role of EU public funding made available for cycling transport projects and reiterates its call for an EU Roadmap for Cycling to be included in the Commission Work Programme 2018. As active promoters of cycling and, in that connection, of green procurements too, municipalities can enhance their own role in the fight against climate change by participating in initiatives such as European Green Capital or Science Meets Regions. Proposals could be put forward to integrate specific, major sections of cycling transport routes into the TEN-T network;

67. highlights that, in accordance with the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive ([11]), new buildings erected in the EU should include electric vehicle charging points (preferably with storage facility). Similarly, refurbishment of blocks of flats should involve such construction activities ([12]);

68. notes that the installation of smart charging systems in buildings could help to ensure that power grids remain flexible, i.e. the energy stored in batteries of electric vehicles could be uploaded to the network. A holistic approach is required that, for instance, treats electric vehicles as integral parts of the building stock;

69. highlights that cities and towns, are the main transport stakeholders in terms of population centres and notes that urban mobility problems cannot be solved with a sectorial approach only. Therefore recalls the real added-value for LRAs when drafting their Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMPs ([13])) at the same time as their Sustainable Energy Action Plans (SEAP), for account to be taken of the link between the urban dimension of transport policy and the broader concept of spatial planning which include an inventory of the real and the ideal local energy mix. These local efforts could receive professional guidance and assistance by the Covenant of Mayors, in order to create more inclusive local transport with less air and noise pollution;

70. similarly, where the regions have spatial planning powers under their legal or constitutional systems, it is recommended that their sustainable urban and interurban mobility plans include initiatives of this type;

71. proposes that thematic European city networks be established for the promotion of low-emission mobility. Such networks would enable local enterprises and even the general public to be more involved in implementing low-emission mobility developments, for example by providing shared mobility services. By using up-to-date IT solutions, these city networks can also mobilise relevant target groups for the wider delivery of low-emission mobility.

Brussels, 13 July 2017.

The President
of the European Committee of the Regions
Markku MARKKULA

([10]) An EU Roadmap for Cycling, Committee of the Regions. Adopted on 12 October 2016.
([11]) Directive 2010/31/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 May 2010 on the energy performance of buildings.
([12]) Ongoing opinion ENVE-VI-019 on 'Energy Efficiency and Buildings' (M. Rijsberman ALDE/NL).
([13]) CoR opinion on the SUMPs COTER-V-048 on the Urban Mobility Package.