

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the

- **'Annual report of the six European TEN-T coordinators' and**
- **'Trans-European Networks: Towards an Integrated Approach'**
- **'Extension of the major trans-European transport axes'**

(2007/C 305/02)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- first of all recalls the importance of TEN-T, which make a significant contribution to the Lisbon goals;
- also emphasises that the coordinators can play a key role in securing agreement among Member States on consistent parameters for the various national sections of each TEN-T axis; with this aim in mind, the Committee of the Regions calls on the Commission to make such an agreement a precondition for EU financial support;
- believes that the European Commission could also encourage the networking of the various local and regional stakeholders affected by TEN-T priority projects, *inter alia* by means of an annual forum. The Committee of the Regions would, moreover, be interested in working together with the Commission in this area;
- yet again regrets the blatant inconsistency between, on the one hand, the crucial importance of TEN networks for the EU, once again highlighted in this communication, and the key role that can be played by financial incentives from the EU, and, on the other, the very small budget allocated, even if this is concentrated on the cross-border sections and bottlenecks, and therefore stresses the need for synergy among all the funding sources available at EU level;
- stresses the importance of extending the transport axes beyond the Union so as to expand trade in goods and movement of people, not only to and from neighbouring countries, but also with the rest of the world;

Reference documents

Annual report of the six European TEN-T coordinators

COM(2006) 490 final

Trans-European Networks: Towards an Integrated Approach

COM(2007) 135 final

Extension of the major trans-European transport axes

COM(2007) 32 final

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Policy recommendations

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

A. *TEN networks*

General points

1. first of all recalls the importance of TEN-T, which make a significant contribution to the Lisbon goals. They are conducive to strengthening regions' territorial cohesion and competitiveness by facilitating the movement of goods and people. European citizens living in the regions will notice the difference that TEN-T make to their daily lives, which can only be a plus for the legitimacy of the European Union;

On the coordinators' reports

2. would particularly like to thank the coordinators for their effective work in moving forward the implementation of priority TEN-T projects, thereby demonstrating just how useful their role is;

3. welcomes the fact that this work and the information provided on it by the Commission do much to enhance transparency of the projects concerned and their implementation, and would thus like to see an active continuation of this dialogue between the Committee of the Regions and the Commission, as many regions are directly affected by these investments being made on their territory;

4. draws particular attention to the strong points of the coordinators' work, which have made for:

- better awareness of the projects and their actual stage of advancement, which should enable informed choices to be made when allocating the TEN-T budget;
- a real improvement in the coordination between stakeholders, in particular as regards cross-border sections, which are recognised as the most delicate; this has in turn led to greater efficiency in the processes of studying and planning projects, especially where no formal international structure existed (for example between Slovenia and Italy);
- the identification of each project with one person, which, for cross-border projects, can smooth the often complex

workings of IGCs and lend the EU's weight and independence to promoting or defending a project (for example, the case of Ms de Palacio in relation to the Lyon-Turin route);

5. notes that these missions have also facilitated coordination among ministries within a given country, which have been subjected to the scrutiny of an outside observer;

6. agrees with the Commission about the need to make an adequate contribution (critical mass, often estimated by the coordinators as the maximum permitted by the regulation) to cross-border projects to get them moving and thus create the greatest possible leverage effect, with a knock-on impact on national networks;

7. highlights the key issue of interoperability, which is a major factor in getting an economic return on investments, and draws particular attention to the decision made when deploying ERTMS to focus on six priority freight corridors, which will encourage the effective use of investments in new infrastructure these axes and make such investments more attractive;

8. also emphasises that the coordinators can play a key role in securing agreement among Member States on consistent parameters for the various national sections of each TEN-T axis; with this aim in mind, the Committee of the Regions calls on the Commission to make such an agreement a precondition for EU financial support;

9. emphasises, as most of the rapporteurs have done, the need for countries themselves to take steps to make best use of these investments: modal shift, good management of priorities for infrastructure use, optimisation of the timing of investments in a particular axis;

10. proposes that coordinators also intervene in discussions regarding various different projects with a view to ensuring, if not consistency of approach, then at least an exchange of views and good practice in the area of studying, setting up and financing projects. The European Commission could also encourage the networking of the various local and regional stakeholders affected by TEN-T priority projects, *inter alia* by means of an annual forum. The Committee of the Regions would, moreover, be interested in working together with the Commission in this area;

11. in the light of positive experiences to date and in parallel with this expansion of the role of the existing coordinators, would like to see, where appropriate, the appointment of other coordinators for priority projects funded by the Union, in particular for those areas which require a strong, often political incentive in order to overcome difficulties in the planning and construction phase, and for priority projects; the Committee of the Regions anyway points out that so far the coordinators have been appointed only for six projects that are in their advanced stages while other priority axes are in need of such support since they involve more Member States (e.g. project No 22, which covers 8 Member States);

12. notes that the various coordinators' reports, which date from July 2006, identify the stages of advancement that are urgently needed to make the projects credible, and the commitments that Member States need to make to optimise the main investment; and therefore

13. would like an assessment to be made of the extent to which these stages have actually been reached — and the commitments met — in order to secure a better basis for decision-making on the allocation of TEN-T appropriations for 2007-2013. Proper account should be taken of the coordinators' analyses and recommendations when making decisions on the awarding of grants, particularly from the multiannual TEN programme;

14. notes that the uncertainty over Community financing beyond 2013 may be a hindrance to projects that would involve little expenditure during the current budget period, and therefore calls for mechanisms to reduce this handicap;

15. the Commission has more precise, detailed and complex information about the state of the preparation of the priority projects supported by the coordinators. This must not compromise the equal treatment of the projects;

16. nonetheless regrets that no comparative analysis of these projects, their state of progress, or of their mutual synergies was carried out, and recommends that the Commission conduct future analysis on the basis of current and relevant statistical information gathered in appropriate form from the Member States concerned. Although the communication highlights the need for the best possible coordination between projects with a view to optimising the timeframe for implementing the TEN-T network, no such analysis has yet been carried out. This could be done by the TEN steering group. Such an analysis could provide additional information useful in relation to the — very restricted — allocation of European support for the period 2007-2013;

On the work of the TEN steering group:

17. agrees with the Commission about the importance of ensuring synergy between TEN projects along a given axis and about the potential benefits involved in terms both of invest-

ment (lower costs, less impact on the territory) and in terms of the effectiveness of the projects themselves;

18. given the difficulties of combining projects that are very different in nature (railway tunnel and high-voltage connection, for example), would like to see this objective of synergy brought within the coordinators' remit, above and beyond the planned handbook of good practice;

19. yet again regrets the blatant inconsistency between, on the one hand, the crucial importance of TEN networks for the EU, once again highlighted in this communication, and the key role that can be played by financial incentives from the EU, and, on the other, the very small budget allocated, even if this is concentrated on the cross-border sections and bottlenecks, and therefore stresses the need for synergy among all the funding sources available at EU level. The European Commission should also explore new sources of funding that might be possible in the future. With this in mind, a medium-term review of the Eurovignette directive seems necessary in order to factor in external costs;

20. notes that the completion of the thirty priority axes will slow the rise in transport-related CO₂ emissions by just 4 %, a very modest result, and would therefore like to see appropriate consideration being given to external costs during a review of the Eurovignette directive so that measures can be taken to encourage modal shift, specifically but not exclusively in sensitive regions and areas, for which more direct, more targeted measures should also be planned. The use of new information technologies, suggested in the communication, could play a part here, as could the development of intelligent transport systems, an area in which Asian countries, for example, are far more advanced than Europe;

21. supports the proposed development of PPPs, in particular by ensuring greater legal certainty and by developing innovative financial instruments at the EIB. However, the undeniable advantages of these arrangements should always set against the extra costs that they may generate initially, and it is also important to spell out clearly the transfer of risks that will be entailed;

22. stresses that since the advantages of opening markets to competition are well recognised in the telecommunications sector, it should also be possible to reap these beneficial effects in the rail transport sector as well. Whilst it is unrealistic to expect that private financing of railway investment will be at the same level as for telecommunications, one should at least be able to expect that opening the railways to competition might lead to better use being made of the investments provided by the public sector;

23. requests that the rules on deconsolidation (within the meaning of the Maastricht convergence criteria) be clarified, and possibly made more flexible, for loans taken out for investments in TEN projects. This issue should certainly be looked at in relation to every strategic investment for the development of the Union;

B. Extension of the major trans-European transport axes

General points

24. stresses the importance of extending the transport axes beyond the Union so as to expand trade in goods and movement of people, not only to and from neighbouring countries, but also with the rest of the world;

25. adds that improving links with countries neighbouring the Union will also make the significant investments made in the TEN-T network more effective;

26. recognises that the managed development and integration of the transport sector between the EU and its neighbours make a major contribution to the implementation of the Lisbon agenda by encouraging trade, sustainable growth and social cohesion;

27. notes that such extensions are significant factors for stabilising democracy and the economy in the neighbouring countries and also contribute to the European neighbourhood policy and help share the Community's achievements, thus facilitating cooperation on all levels with the EU's neighbours, in some cases preparing them for possible future membership;

Concerning the report of the high-level group

28. first of all stresses the very high quality of the report of the high-level group chaired by Ms Loyola de Palacio, to whose memory it pays tribute;

29. highly valued the consultation process, which gave credibility and added value to the high-level group's work;

30. would like this very comprehensive and detailed report to serve as a basis for determining the precise action to be taken in the short and medium term;

31. highlights the relevance of the transnational axes identified:

- the five 'transnational axes' fully meet transport link requirements by extending the priority TEN-T axes and grouping them into large sectors;

- the motorways of the sea, a key part of current developments in world trade, are properly taken into account as an axis in their own right;

- notes that the avenues for possible improvement are very similar to those identified within the Union for implementing TEN-T:

- better coordination between countries along a given axis;

- removal of bottlenecks of all kinds;

- improved interoperability;

- exchange of good practice;

32. in this context, welcomes the Commission's initiative in launching 'an exercise to identify bottlenecks and their solutions in Freight Transport Logistics';

33. notes that the report proposes firm deadlines that are not taken up in the communication: examining and updating the main axes, projects and horizontal measures by 2010, with a mid-term review in 2008;

Regarding the communication from the Commission itself:

34. endorses the recommendation made to the Council and the Parliament to accept the proposal to revise the concept of the Pan-European Corridors/Areas in line with the guidelines contained in the report;

35. nonetheless regrets that, although the axes are described as concerning all transport modes, no general guidance is given regarding which modes of transport are to be promoted, except for the motorways of the sea, whose importance the Committee of the Regions stresses; such general guidance would in particular provide an opportunity to promote the shift towards environmentally friendly transport modes;

36. recalls on this occasion the key points of its opinion of 14 February 2007 on the mid-term review of the Transport White Paper:

- the extension of the TEN-T network into neighbouring countries is one of the most important goals of the European transport policy, nevertheless finishing off the TEN-T in the EU27 must remain of higher priority for the EU;

- one of the aims of European transport policy must be to soften the impact that transport has on the natural environment, e.g. by honouring commitments made under the Kyoto protocol on CO₂ emissions (point 1.4);

- it is a matter of priority to rebalance the modal distribution of land transport, and it is necessary to deploy strategies to promote intermodality and multimodality (point 2.1);

37. therefore, in line with the concern expressed during public consultations, would like to see a firm emphasis placed on environmental aspects, and the establishment of the principle of modal choices consistent with Kyoto commitments and sustainable development goals;

38. stresses the importance and urgency of horizontal measures to promote interoperability; such measures are indeed included in the communication, which also sets out the principles for establishing action plans;

39. endorses the proposed institutional structure, consisting of three levels:

- regional steering groups, coordinated amongst themselves;
- ministerial meetings to take strategic decisions; and
- a secretariat providing administrative and technical support,

and furthermore urges in the future that:

- firstly, the secretariat be funded jointly by the countries involved and the European Commission so as to guarantee the quality and continuity of its work and;
- secondly, the secretariat be involved prior to the award of grants for projects;

40. regrets a certain reticence in the communication as regards action to be taken, in terms both of investment and of implementing the institutional proposals;

41. would therefore like exploratory discussions to be held very soon with neighbouring countries, in parallel with the establishment of the regional steering groups, with a view to laying down the measures to be implemented in the short and medium term;

42. asks for confirmation, from the earliest stages of this process, of the financial implications, which are set out in the high-level group's report but not mentioned in the communication;

43. also asks that the regional and local governments concerned be widely involved in planning and implementing actions so as to achieve effective synergy with local developments in terms both of the economy and of spatial planning.

Brussels, 10 October 2007.

The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Michel DELEBARRE
