

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the 'Commission Communication to the Council, European Parliament, Economic and Social Committee and Committee of Regions on the Common Transport Policy — Sustainable Mobility: Perspectives for the Future'

(1999/C 258/02)

On 7 December 1998 the Commission decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Article 262 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 8 June 1999. The rapporteur was Mr Morgan.

At its 365th plenary session (meeting of 7 July 1999) the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 107 votes to 1 with 2 abstentions.

1. Introduction

1.1. In 1992 the Commission published its White Paper on the future development of the Common Transport Policy⁽¹⁾; in 1995 it adopted a five-year action programme for transport⁽²⁾. On 1 December 1998 it published this communication which reviews progress, assesses what would be done in the last two years of the existing action programme, and looks at what would be needed in the period from 2000 to 2004.

1.2. The many strands of transport policy interact strongly with each other and must be considered together. The timescale over which transport facilities are developed means that policy must be planned far ahead. Therefore the Committee welcomes the Commission's decision to review its future action programme for the Common Transport Policy (CTP).

1.3. The Commission sets out the three main aims of the CTP, with a number of subsidiary objectives:

- (a) Improving efficiency and competitiveness.
 - (i) Market access and functioning.
 - (ii) Integrated transport systems.
 - (iii) Fair and efficient pricing in transport⁽³⁾.
 - (iv) Economic and social cohesion.
 - (v) Making sure the rules are applied.

(b) Improving quality.

- (i) Safety.
- (ii) Environment.
- (iii) Protecting consumers and improving the quality of transport services.
- (iv) Preparing for the future.

(c) Improving external effectiveness.

2. Objectives and monitoring

2.1. The Committee believes it is essential that the CTP has clear objectives and that the legislative programme reflects these effectively. In this context the Committee regrets that the Commission's vision for 2010 and beyond is not yet developed. This will have a high priority for the new Commission, but until it has been prepared it is not easy to assess the adequacy of the short-term programme up to 2004. Furthermore, the Commission now has many statistics at its disposal. Hopefully these are relevant and valuable. The ESC would like to see these more fully deployed as evidence of the effectiveness of previous initiatives and in support of future priorities.

2.2. The ESC believes that 'Sustainable Mobility' requires a transport policy which meets current and future economic, social and environmental goals by getting maximum efficiency from current technologies and developing new sustainable technologies while minimising disturbance to the human and natural environment. Therefore the ultimate objectives should be economic, social and environmental.

2.2.1. Economic objectives for transport are:

- (a) A central role in supporting the single market.
- (b) Facilitating links with candidates for enlargement and other countries.

⁽¹⁾ COM(92) 494 final, Commission Communication on the future development of the Common Transport Policy (White Paper) — ESC opinion, OJ C 352, 30.12.1993.

⁽²⁾ COM(1995) 302 final, Commission Communication on the Common Transport Policy — Action programme 1995-2000 — ESC own-initiative opinion, OJ C 39, 12.2.1996.

⁽³⁾ COM(1998) 466 final, Commission White Paper Fair Payment for Infrastructure Use: A phased approach to a common transport infrastructure charging framework in the EU — ESC opinion, OJ C 116, 28.4.1999.

- (c) Underpinning the competitiveness of Europe in the global economy.
- (d) Both direct and indirect growth in employment.

2.2.2. Economic objectives contribute to social objectives through taxation and employment, but other social objectives include:

- (a) Social and regional cohesion of the European Union.
- (b) Accessibility for the excluded citizens to transport.
- (c) Providing environmentally friendly transport choices.
- (d) Provision of adequate urban transport systems.
- (e) Safety.

In this context the Committee responded to the communication on Transport and Cohesion.

2.2.3. Environmental objectives ensure that economic development is sustainable and compatible with protection of the human and natural environment. The ESC welcomes the Commission's focus on this matter. Key issues include:

- (a) Achieving efficiency in all modes.
- (b) Revitalizing railways and collective motor transport.
- (c) Minimising air and noise pollution.
- (d) Addressing the problem of global warming.
- (e) Spatial planning.
- (f) Development of urban transport systems.

2.3. While other objectives such as quality improvement, highlighted by the Commission, are important ways of achieving the aim of improved economic, social and environmental conditions, they should be recognized as means to an end not an end in themselves.

2.4. The Commission's communication needs to put more emphasis on the role of transport within the European Union. It does not sufficiently relate its intermediate objectives and action plan back to the fundamental purpose of using transport to improve social, environmental and economic conditions in Europe. If it did so, its prescriptions would be more urgent and effective.

2.5. As well as setting objectives it is important to monitor and so the Commission's intention to develop a European transport data system is welcomed. A better understanding of transport through research and data collection will enhance the Community's ability to bring about improvements. The ESC welcomes the research already undertaken under the Fourth Framework Programme for RTD (1994-1998)⁽¹⁾. However, the Committee would like to see more data deployed in the support of priorities and hope this will be the case when the CTP is revised in 2000.

3. Modal issues

Roads

3.1. Motor transport shares with air transport the characteristics of being quite indispensable in today's world. Yet because the internal combustion engine represents a major environmental problem, their overwhelming importance in terms of both utility and economic contribution tends to be offset by sustained political and social attack. In the view of the ESC the correct approach is to adopt measures which can slow and even reduce the growth of these modes by providing attractive and practical modal alternatives including public transport while at the same time exploiting new technology to reduce the environmental damage per passenger or freight tonne mile. The solution is not to be found in putting up prices indiscriminately in these modes, because it would threaten the competitiveness of the European economy.

3.2. The road network has a central role to play in bringing the Community together. The aim must be to ensure adequate investment, efficient use and sustainable management of the network.

3.3. The EU's Trans-European Transport Networks set out the backbone of an EU transport system, including road links. However progress by Member States on many of these routes has been slow and is not really acceptable. The Committee looks forward to the White Paper revising the TEN-T guidelines. In addition, while it is right to focus on the major priority projects, there has been insufficient urgency in finding ways to ensure that the rest of the TENS network is also able to fulfil its role effectively. Measurement of Member States' progress is available from the Commission.

3.4. The road network is important for both freight and passenger transport, but the Commission's transport policy (including proposals for pricing) has focused mainly on freight

⁽¹⁾ See ESC opinion on the 'Fourth Framework Programme for RTD (1994-1998)'; OJ C 34, 2.2.1994.

and commercial transport. This is a mistake, not just because the single market needs efficient passenger transport, but also because the majority of traffic is private motor car traffic and any attempt to tackle congestion while ignoring this is sure to fail. Presumably there is a finite limit to the quantity of private cars. Public collective motor transport is a key component of an efficient passenger transport system and an alternative to personal private transport.

3.5. Essential to getting the European Union's roads to fulfil their purpose is to balance supply and demand. There are environmental limits to the number of roads that can be built, although certain key roads are still needed. At peak times in many places demand is often too high and supply is too low, partly because the price signals in transport are wrong. The Committee therefore welcomes the Commission's intention to encourage fair and efficient pricing in transport, including roads⁽¹⁾, where differential pricing will be needed. However it must be recognized that there is an inherent uncertainty in estimated external marginal costs, and also that transport pricing must not damage competitiveness.

3.6. Post-war spatial development across Europe (domestic, industrial, and retail) has encouraged a greater dependence on roads at the expense of other modes of transport. This is true in both suburban and the wider environment. Future spatial development policies adopted by Member States and at regional and local levels will have profound implications for transport and in particular the dependence on roads. It is disappointing that action has not progressed faster on this. This is a central issue for the next century. The ESC encourages the Commission to take greater account of spatial use issues when allocating structural funds.

3.7. Enforcement of vehicle and driver regulations in commercial transport is very important, both to ensure a level playing field, and to improve safety.

Rail

3.8. The Commission rightly devotes considerable attention to revitalisation of the railways but it must at the same time be recognized that the railways are just one of many solutions to the economic and environmental problems of transport.

3.9. The Commission is right to say that the key issue is to address the decline in rail's share of transport. If existing policies continue to be followed, the decline will persist, with increasing environmental costs and fewer jobs on the railways.

3.10. Every opportunity must be taken to improve the share of railways in freight, and the Council and the Commission are urged to pursue the revitalisation of the railways with even more vigour and speed. Schemes such as freight freeways and competition between operators have potential, but will need to receive Europe-wide acceptance in order to achieve the benefits. In this context the Commission should endeavour to achieve genuine cross border cooperation.

3.11. Change is also needed for passenger rail where a similar shift to flexible, competitive, passenger-responsive services is required. The emerging network of high-speed rail lines is important for integrating the European Union, bringing markets closer together and reducing the need for short-haul air services.

3.12. To reduce urban and suburban road congestion there is a requirement in many major cities to upgrade and expand the 19th century commuter rail networks using 21st century technology, to ensure that they accommodate modern travel patterns. Collective public road transport should also play a part in these plans. The ESC welcomes the Commission's intention to pursue its action programme following the Citizen's Network initiative.⁽²⁾

3.13. There is certainly no one solution to the arrangements for ownership and operation of rail services. However, if the necessary revolution is to be brought about then freight and passenger train operators must be given the scope and the mandate to meet customer expectations in the urban, national and international markets for both freight and passenger transport.⁽³⁾

3.14. Achieving seamless cross border rail transport for passengers and freight means tackling the problem of systems interoperability and necessary skills upgrading. The Committee welcomes the Commission's intention to examine this issue shortly.

⁽¹⁾ COM(1998) 466 final, Commission White Paper Fair Payment for Infrastructure Use: A phased approach to a common transport infrastructure charging framework in the EU-ESC opinion, OJ C 116, 28.4.1999.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 138, 18.5.1999, p. 7.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 209, 22.7.1999, p. 22.

Air

3.15. Faster progress must be made towards fully integrating and modernizing the air traffic control networks over Europe. As the skies become increasingly crowded this becomes more urgent. Efficient routing of flights will enhance customer satisfaction and reduce environmental damage.

3.16. In addition to improved air traffic control it is essential to keep the supply of airport capacity ahead of demand. Funding of airports should be transparent and avoid unfair competition.

3.17. Non-availability of take off and landing slots at the most popular airports is a potential barrier to entry of new operators into the aviation market. The Commission needs to ensure that newcomers can obtain slots.

3.18. The consumer and the economy will benefit from the lower fares which airline competition is bringing about. However there is still some way to go to achieve fair and open market conditions in practice. Therefore it is important that the Commission plays a role in monitoring progress in air services competition and ensuring that the advantages of competition are available throughout the EU. In addition it is important to understand the impact of liberalization on the social sphere with its implications for employment standards, quality and safety. The communication from the Commission on the European airline industry⁽¹⁾ explores the aspects of the air transport market.

3.19. It is also important to ensure that the benefits of increased competition are felt not only on internal links, but also on Europe's external links to the rest of the world. Open skies agreements need to be reached, so it is urgent to reconcile the views of the Commission and the Member States.

Water transport

3.20. Ports, waterways and shipping are important links in the EU's transport network. The Commission must ensure that there is sustainable, fair and safe competition on the routes served by water transport, and in the port facilities that support them. The ESC looks forward to the proposals for the liberalization of port services⁽²⁾. The network of European transport also needs efficient road and rail links to be integrated with ports.

3.21. Inland waterways form part of the TEN network. The Rhine Danube Rhone nexus is central to this network and the position of the Danube in particular needs special EU attention. In order to improve interoperability between countries it is important to work on the harmonization of waterway operational conditions.

3.22. The taxation and regulation of shipping must work to maintain the attractiveness of Europe (with high standards for ships and crews) as a place to flag fleets, while not at the same time introducing damaging tax competition within Europe.

3.23. Enlargement plans and accession negotiations must address the issue of safety standards in the maritime registers of certain applicant countries (e.g. Malta and Cyprus). Matching existing EU standards must be a condition of their accession to the EU.

4. General issues

4.1. Previous Committee opinions⁽³⁾ drew attention to the following points, certain of which remain unresolved:

4.1.1. The need to pay more attention to structural shifts in the economies of Member States and the implications for transport use and modal development.

4.1.2. The difficulty in reconciling liberal economic policies to ensure choice and competition in transport with subsidies to promote particular types of transport.

4.1.3. The failure of the Commission to publish data on consumption and impact of transport modes across the EU now and forecasts for the supply of and demand for transport within and external to the EU in the future.

4.1.4. The need for the Commission to give detailed guidelines on the issues of external costs and green taxation associated with transport.

4.2. Since then the Commission has made considerable progress with its pricing initiatives. Work on improving transport data statistics is well advanced; the Committee now hopes to see them in wider use. The White Paper on Fair and Efficient pricing of transport⁽⁴⁾ is welcome, but its timetable assumes very slow progress.

(1) COM(1999) 182 final, Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 'The European airline industry: from single market to world-wide challenges'; ESC opinion in elaboration.

(2) OJ C 407, 28.12.1998, p. 92.

(3) OJ C 39, 12.2.1996, p. 43 — OJ C 352, 30.12.1993, p. 11.

(4) COM(1998) 466 final, Commission White Paper Fair Payment for Infrastructure Use: A phased approach to a common transport infrastructure charging framework in the EU; ESC opinion, OJ C 116, 28.4.1999.

4.3. The effectiveness of the Common Transport Policy depends on ensuring the competition rules and legislation are applied properly. The ESC welcomes the Commission's intention to pursue this. At the same time it is important to ensure that competition between modes of transport is kept free and fair.

Integration

4.4. Integration between different modes of transport is essential to an efficient transport system. The Committee welcomes the Commission's Fifth Framework programme⁽¹⁾ research on intermodality. It is also important that technical systems supporting transport across Europe are better integrated.

4.5. Also within the Fifth Framework programme, the ESC welcomes the key actions to investigate ways of improving the efficiency and environmental performance of individual means of transport, notably aircraft, ships, rail systems and road vehicles. There should also be a concern for noise pollution⁽²⁾.

4.6. Intelligent transport systems and electronic tolling systems are close to widespread adoption in Europe. The Commission's communication states the need to ensure technical compatibility but this is presented as a longer-term aim. It needs to be treated more urgently.

4.7. The pros and cons of road and air transport were discussed in paragraph 3.1. While for surface transport road is often the most user-friendly and economic solution for passengers and freight, the long-term threat to the environment is considerable. Any increases in the cost of road transport must be implemented in a way consistent with the implications for competitiveness and broad public consent. The ESC favours the options of technological improvement and the development of alternative modes.

4.7.1. Technological improvement involves the internal combustion engine, including both efficiency improvement and the introduction of substitute fuels. The CTP so far has achieved more reduction of emissions by technical regulations than by pricing, and the progress on fuel cell technology suggests that regulators should continue to press for technological improvements.

4.7.2. Modal development includes intermodal integration and modal adaptation to modern surface freight and passenger travel patterns so that, in particular, private motor transport as the default option is less and less important. The ESC welcomes the Commission's focus on intermodal transport

but is concerned by the lack of evidence as to the results obtained. Spatial planning and collective urban transport systems are of fundamental importance here.

4.8. Fair and efficient pricing is necessary to optimize the efficiency of each mode of transport and to achieve a better balance. In direct economic terms the obvious gap is road pricing. However this will only work to the benefit of Europe if it avoids, on balance, unduly pushing up the overall cost of transportation, and deals with passenger car congestion, not just commercial freight.

4.9. Taking all of the above issues into account, a case in point is 'freight freeways'. Options could be examined for establishing 'seamless' international road, rail (and air) freight freeways, using market mechanisms to allocate freight between each mode and technological innovation to improve the capacity of each system.

Economic and Social Cohesion

4.10. Transport has a vital role to play in bringing Europe together. The communication applies this to economically weaker regions but should also give attention to the importance of transport in peripheral and ultraperipheral regions.

4.11. Better transport systems are also important for social cohesion by giving people better access to jobs and giving employers access to a wider and deeper pool of workers.

4.12. Where public services are liberalized, provision still needs to be made to ensure that there is no social exclusion. The ethos of public service at the margins of society should not be lost.

4.13. Particularly in view of the liberalization taking place in most transport sectors, it is important that the social dialogue is fully developed.

4.14. The extension of working hours regulation to previously excluded transport sectors must be done in a way that ensures safety without damaging employment through excessive regulation and inflexibility.⁽³⁾

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 407, 28.12.1998, p. 123.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 206, 7.7.1997.

⁽³⁾ COM(1998) 662 final, Proposal for a Council Directive amending Directive 93/104/EC, 23.11.1993, concerning certain aspects of the organization of working time to cover sectors and activities excluded from that Directive, Proposal for a Council Directive concerning the organization of working time for mobile workers performing road transport activities and for self-employed drivers, Proposal for a Council Directive concerning the enforcement of seafarers' hours of work on board ships using Community ports; OJ C 138, 18.5.1999.

4.15. Abolition of duty free sales within the EU is an economic and employment issue in the context of inter country transport links.

External effectiveness

4.16. The communication gives little emphasis to the wider issues of international transport links with the rest of the world, and the economic importance of efficient trade routes.

4.17. The Commission rightly gives prominence to the transport implications of enlargement. There are major challenges here that will need work on legal and technical compatibility. Investment support in Central and Eastern Europe needs to extend beyond major inter-urban routes to helping applicant countries avoid the spatial planning problems that have aggravated the environmental impact of transport in EU countries. Attention is needed to halt the decline of the railways and improve (urban) public transport.

4.18. Policies pursued with candidate countries can also be applied to neighbouring countries in the Mediterranean and Black Sea zones.

Safety

4.19. The emphasis given to evaluating the cost-effectiveness of safety measures is welcome as a way of achieving the most benefit with available resources. The ESC welcomes the continued focus on safety issues in the civil aviation, maritime and road transport sectors. The development of the European New Car Assessment Programme (EURO-NCAP) should be continued, and further attention focused in particular on vehicle safety for cyclists and pedestrians. The Committee would also like to see renewed emphasis on measures to prevent road traffic accidents.

4.20. With tens of thousands of people killed on the European Union's roads every year, safety must be one of the principal considerations in all aspects of transport policy. Past policies have been very successful, but more assessment is needed to determine what has worked best. This focus on

safety must then be maintained in future policy and should be given greater prominence in the Commission's document.

5. Conclusion

5.1. The ESC welcomes this opportunity to review the status of the Common Transport Policy. However, the Committee has a number of proposals:

5.1.1. The Committee would like the Commission to refocus the CTP around economic, social and environmental objectives, as explained in section 2.

5.1.2. Given this change in focus, the ESC believes that the action plans will acquire the urgency and vitality that the importance of transport policy demands. If this is done, then transport will also fulfil its considerable potential for job creation.

5.1.3. The Committee is encouraged by the progress on transport statistics, and hopes to see them more widely deployed in support of transport policy. It is likely that a factually-based progress report would inject a useful sense of urgency. In the same context, the appraisal and monitoring of EU financed projects can be improved.

5.1.4. The ESC recognizes that a number of issues, especially urban and suburban transport, are governed by subsidiarity. However, they are so central to the general evolution of transport policy, and to meeting the economic, social and environmental objectives laid down in 2.2.1 to 2.2.3, that the Council as well as the Commission must give them top priority.

5.1.5. The development and volume of personal private transport (the motor car), whether or not powered by the internal combustion engine, is a major strategic issue to be taken into account in the future CTP.

5.1.6. One of the most important issues, and again a matter of Member State discretion, is spatial planning policy. Unless land use is planned in a way consistent with the principles of sustainable mobility, it is unlikely that the CTP goals will ever be met.

Brussels, 7 July 1999.

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of the Economic and Social Committee
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