

ECTRI COMMENTS FOR THE MID-TERM ASSESSMENT OF THE WHITE PAPER - EUROPEAN TRANSPORT POLICY FOR 2010: TIME TO DECIDE

1. Conclusions

General

The White Paper presents a rather limited number of actual objectives for the European transport system. The structure needs improvement as there are too many measures on different levels, which make the document difficult to read, understand, adopt and implement.

Four years period is a rather short time to evaluate the success of transport policy and its implementation. Many outcomes of the policies can not really be seen to be effective on that time. This holds true also for policy evaluation projects like INDIC, ASSESS or TRANSFORUM. Furthermore, this kind of assessment projects should be made more public and participatory than today, to really contribute to the policy formulation.

More emphasis must be given to the question of how to get measures presented in European Policy documents implemented in a country level. There is no general rule for implementation. Every measure needs to be considered case by case (region by region), which makes the implementation throughout Europe even more difficult.

Shifting the balance between modes of transport

Our understanding is that so far, the modal shares of rail, inland waterways and oil pipelines continue to decrease, thereby moving away from the objective of stabilising the share of alternative transport modes. Such a development indicates that White Paper policies, especially their implementation, have not been very effective so far.

Eliminating bottlenecks

Some bottlenecks of international transport have been removed during the past years with financial aid from EC, but it is difficult to say whether this can be seen as a consequence of the White Paper.

Managing the globalisation of transport

This is an issue that has been dealt properly within the original White Paper but especially on air and maritime transport more EU presence on global level will be needed.

Value for money (quality, pricing, taxation)

New assessment practices developed nationally and on European level, and taken into use throughout Europe, are an effective tool for ensuring that money is used for correct purposes. Understanding of the effects and implementation issues of transport pricing has been spread to the European and national decision makers, and 5th and 6th FP research has had an important role here. European research should continue these methodological developments.

Safety

The road transport target presented in the White Paper is rather demanding compared to the current situation and would require extensive adoption of measures.

Such measures, however, are missing from the action list. With the other modes the situation however looks better and many measures presented by the White Paper have been implemented successfully.

New transport technologies

New technologies, especially ICT, and innovations are fundamentally about social change, and they become relevant only when they are taken into meaningful (common) use in social practice, i.e. in everyday life. This is why more effort in identifying the needs and hopes of end users and the society as a whole, in policy and ICT development is needed.

Environmental sustainability

The White Paper should be made to provide more emphasis on the policies to achieve the Kyoto target regarding greenhouse gas emissions from transport. On the other hand, one has to remember, that global environmental problems cannot be solved with measures inside the transport sector only, since they are based on or are consequences of more fundamental issues like population growth and changes in consumption patterns, technological development, and consequently cooperation with other sectors of our society, and their policy formulation is in this issue fundamentally important.

2. Answers to the 10 Questions

Shifting the balance between modes, traffic relief and safety improvements

1. Do you observe a halt in the decline of rail, in particular for freight? What role is played by rail policy?

Relative decline of rail is still continuing, both on passenger and freight transport. Certain new services/lines may have local impact to the desired direction. European funding has helped with the infrastructure development. The establishment of ERA, setting European rail market area without borders and introduction of new technologies for the management of rail traffic have been the main contributions of the White Paper to rail transport.

2. How is road transport developing, in particular international transport and cabotage after the enlargement?

Freight transport volume has grown rapidly, and has generally been strongly coupled with growth in GDP. Consequently the objective of decoupling GDP and transport growth has not been achieved. Closer inspection reveals great regional differences, with growth faster than GDP in the old Member States and slower than GDP in the new Member States. This is mainly a result of the economic restructuring in the new Member States over the past decade. International freight flows are increasing on the roads. Hauliers from the new member countries have increased their market share. Private car volumes are increasing. The Marco Polo programme and funding of TEN "priority projects" have been the main contributions of the White Paper to easing of road transport.

3. What is the situation of intermodal/combined transport in your country? What is the position of inland waterways transport (if there is any in your country)?

The decrease in the modal shares of rail, inland waterways and oil pipelines seems to continue, thereby moving away from the objective of stabilising the share of alternative transport modes. The Marco Polo programme is an ongoing contribution of White Paper to intermodal transport and cannot be assessed at the moment.

4. Are there any developments in congestion and pollution on the main axes, in air transport, in the cities, in particularly sensitive areas?

Growth in the volume of passenger transport has nearly paralleled that in GDP. Transport growth was marginally lower than GDP growth between 1997 and 2001, but once again exceeded it in 2002. Decoupling between transport demand and GDP over the period has been less than 0.5% per year compared with transport growth of 2.1% per year, and decoupling has not been achieved each year.

After a small decline in 2002, passenger transport by air has started to increase again, with even faster pace than before. White Paper's actions put in place, such as creation of "single sky", EMSA, and negotiations with the US on the transatlantic market are all favourable, but at the moment there doesn't seem to be any will, or courage, to limit the growth of air transport or at least, to limit the environmental impact of the growth of air transport.

Many Member States have introduced incentives to promote the use of low and zero-sulphur fuels ahead of the mandatory deadlines (a maximum of 50 ppm "low" in 2005 and a maximum of 10 ppm "zero" in 2009). The combined penetration increased from around 20 to almost 50% between 2002 and 2003, but this is still some way off the 2005 target of 100%. The penetration of biofuels and other alternative fuels is low. The share of biofuels in the EU-25 is less than 0.4%, still far off the 2% target set for 2005. However, following the adoption of the Biofuels Directive in 2003, national initiatives are rapidly changing the situation. CIVITAS and CUTE actions to support urban transport have been the main contributions of White Paper to congestion and pollution in cities. These are however only programmes/ projects, do they lead to any concrete actions? Who is responsible for the implementation of the results of the actions?

5. What are the trends as regards road safety?

The target presented in the White paper is very demanding compared to the current situation and would require extensive adoption of measures, which have been proven effective. Such measures, however, are not included in the action list. The adoption of new "priority projects" for TEN has impact also on road traffic accidents. These new projects, however, cannot reach the extent, which could bring the number of accidents even close to the presented target. Stricter working hours legislation is gradually being implemented in the Member States. Enhancement of police enforcement (speeding, alcohol, drugs, etc.) is suffering from insufficient resources and lack of political will even though it is generally acceptable to the public.

The financial and economic situation of the transport sectors

6. What is the financial situation of companies within the various modes, including infrastructure managers? How is the industrial structure evolving?

Some large rail, road and ship freight companies are making profit, but in general especially rail companies are often heavily subsidised. Road freight operators are typically SMEs with limited negotiation power, and they are in tough situation especially now with raising fuel prices and increased international competition especially in the freight transport to and from Russia.

Infrastructure managers are dealing with the whole range of problems: some routes are congested, others have very low demand, and roads, railways, bridges, etc. need refurbishment. Balancing between the need to improve priority corridors and the need to keep the whole network in feasible condition requires also EC funding in both old and new Member States. Policies of the White Paper have not had any significant influence on the situation of transport sector companies yet.

7. How are infrastructure investments developing, in particular on the corridors of the trans-European network? What are the financing perspectives of public budgets and charging? Will these perspectives allow the completion of the priority corridors by 2020?

There seems to be very little information available on the allocation of EU investments on infrastructure projects. This is a problem, as these use large amount of EC funding, and may be seen one of the most important measures available. According to INDIC and ASSESS projects, EU's financial support on investments has had more significance in the new Member States, and only a couple of major projects in the old members of the EU have been heavily dependent on the aid.

Priorities for the future

8. What actions of the White Paper need to be reinforced? What are the new actions to be added, in which new fields?

Generally said actions in the White paper should be more specific. Monitoring of the actions (what has been achieved) by the actions presented is currently poor. The monitoring of action impact should be added, inclusive concrete figures allowing checking target achievements. On the other hand, outcomes of any policy process need more than couple of years to have any effect on the transport system, which is a messy, complex technological system. The indicators to be used should be developed and chosen rapidly. Short term economic impacts seem to overrun long term strategic goals in decision making, both on European and national levels.

9. Which should be the priority actions between now and 2010 (congestion limitation, new technologies, trans-European network, charging, focus on the corridors, new actions on urban transport)?

The level of implementation of the White Paper policy "Adopting a policy for effective charging for transport" has been very low, according to INDIC and ASSESS projects. Charging is, however, an effective and advisable measure also in cities, where EC has no real voice. This makes the implementation of charging policy problematic and also partly explains the low level of implementation.

Action should be focused on mode split changes in the favour of those transport modes that are more environmentally friendly and use energy sources economically. In addition, security of public transport is a very important aspect as a result of terrorist attacks in Madrid and London.

The Commission should closely follow the completion of TEN corridors that should be one of the main priorities.

The European urban policy should be defined and step by step implemented. New approaches to transport in urban areas should be proposed and the Commission should promote the implementation of known best practices. The Transport Policy should consider not only member states, but should be extended to other countries in the neighbourhood of the EU countries.

10. What new additional actions between now and 2010 on safety issues (maritime, aviation, road)?

New organisations for rail, maritime, and aviation safety have been established for Europe and in the Member States. Will this be enough to secure safety targets of those modes? Road transport safety is, however, the real issue here, and the new Member states put the goal in a real test. The EU goal to reduce the number of killed in road transport should consider the EU extension. New member states should get an intensive support from EU to achieve both their own targets and pan-European ones. EU should use all its power to encourage extensive implementation of effective road safety measures by way of outmost priority. Besides Public transport security should be also one of the main targets for the next period.