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**Communication « A sustainable future
for transport – Towards an integrated,
technology-led and user friendly
system »**

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CEMR position paper

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Conseil des Communes et Régions d'Europe • Council of European Municipalities and Regions

15 Rue de Richelieu F-75 001 Paris
tel : + 33 1 44 50 59 59

cemr@ccre.org - www.ccre.org

1 Square de Meeûs B-1000 Bruxelles
Tel : + 32 2 511 74 77

Communication on a sustainable future for transport – COM(2009)279/4

Background

The communication of the Commission launches a consultation to identify policy measures that will be presented in a White paper on EU transport policy covering the 2010-2020 period. The communication outlines long-term challenges and objectives for transport in Europe and invites stakeholders to propose related policy measures.

CEMR key points :

- The contribution of local and regional government is decisive to achieve sustainable transport in Europe. While fully respecting the subsidiarity and self-government principles, the EU should provide the legislative, regulatory, technological and financial framework that will allow municipalities and regions to implement sustainable mobility policies.
- CEMR insists on the need for coherency between the future White Paper on EU transport policy and both the reviewed Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs and the revised EU sustainable development strategy, both to be published in 2010. The White Paper should also be in line with the objectives of the EU climate and energy package and the future international agreement on climate.
- We emphasize the necessary territorial dimension of the future White paper. Transport plays a key role to ensure the competitiveness of the economy of urban and rural areas and is also a relevant tool to foster social inclusion. We therefore suggest that social and territorial cohesion should be better reflected in the policy objectives of the EU transport policy.
- The reduction of the negative environmental impacts of transport should be the main aim of the future transport policy, through a decoupling of road transport growth from economic growth and a serious modal shift towards more sustainable modes of transport.
- Measures focusing on intermodality and interoperability at local and regional level and the improvement of cross-border public transport are necessary to achieve integrated transport networks.
- We point out the need to improve the access to Trans-European Networks of Transport for all EU regions and new Member States, and to ensure their consistency with local and regional transport plans.
- CEMR welcomes the implementation of the “polluter-pays” and “user-pays” principles in the transport policy. Innovative economic instruments are solutions to be explored but cannot replace public funding.
- Local and regional public transport requires significant financial contribution and we call for the development of European financing solutions adapted to local and regional mobility projects. The transport issue should also be adequately addressed in the review of the EU budget and the future cohesion policy.
- Measures at source to reduce the environmental negative impacts of transport are crucial and we advocate strong EU-wide measures on vehicles emissions and environmental standards. The current economic crisis should not serve as an excuse to lower the level of ambition of EU legislation in this field.

Introduction

1. The communication of the European Commission on a sustainable future for transport is the basis for a consultation to prepare a White paper on EU transport policy awaited for 2010. The latter will define policy measures for the next decade, aimed at tackling the long-term challenges of transport in Europe.
2. The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) is the umbrella organisation gathering 53 national associations representing local and regional government in 38 countries¹. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the White paper on EU transport policy and call for the active involvement of local and regional government in the future related policy developments.

Coordinated action for a sustainable transport

3. Good governance is essential to achieve sustainable transport, so that the White paper should provide the basis for cooperation between the different levels of government in the shaping, implementation and financing of policy measures. Both a clear definition of responsibilities and an improved coordination would ensure the adequacy between European, national, regional and local transport policies.
4. Municipalities and regions have significant competences in terms of spatial planning and mobility management, as well as economic development and social and territorial cohesion. They understand the impact of transport on the quality of life of their citizens and the competitiveness of their territory.
5. Transport is a central dimension of both urban and rural policies. Cities and towns are the starting point and end of traffic flows and concentrate the EU population and economic activities. It is also the place where the negative impacts of transport, such as air pollution, noise nuisance, health problems and congestion, are directly experienced. In rural areas, the transport offer is crucial to guarantee the access to employment, schools, shops, leisure activities and public services. The individual car is often the main transport mean, thus the importance of creating innovative schemes for rural public transport. Ensuring rural accessibility to the regional and urban transport network is essential to sustain rural communities.
6. The contribution of local and regional government is decisive to the future of the EU transport policy and we stress that many municipalities and regions are already taking action for a more sustainable mobility². Local and regional decision-makers know best the local conditions and needs, and what suits their citizens. Thus, it is essential that the future White paper fully respects the principles of subsidiarity and local self-government. At the same time, we believe that the EU has a key role to play to empower municipalities and regions to develop sustainable mobility policies, not only through the support to the exchange of experiences and best practices, but also through the development of a legislative, regulatory and financial framework, within the limits of EU competences, that will help them to implement climate-proof, integrated, technology-led and user-friendly transport systems.

¹ CEMR recent policy positions on transport, in particular the Stuttgart Declaration on the role of European Local and regional governments regarding sustainable mobility, the position paper on the Green paper on urban mobility and the position paper on the directive on clean and energy-efficient vehicles, are available at: http://www.ccre.org/prises_de_positions_en.htm?ID=1.

² Examples of local and regional initiatives in the field of mobility can be found on the website of the EU-funded project ELTIS: <http://www.eltis.org>

Challenges and objectives for the transport in Europe

7. The Communication of the Commission on the future of transport identifies six challenges that will influence the EU transport policy in the next decades: ageing, migration and internal mobility, environmental challenges, increasing scarcity of fossil fuels, urbanisation and global trends affecting European transport policy.
8. CEMR agrees with these challenges and particularly the attention paid to urbanisation. Cities should not be seen as obstacles to sustainable transport but as part of the solution since they offer a wide range of possibilities for the implementation of sustainable mobility measures. We thus wish the urban issue to be addressed appropriately in the White paper.
9. In order to meet these challenges, the communication outlines seven policy objectives with which we broadly agree. These objectives and the future White paper should be fully consistent with other EU policies and legislation that closely relate to transport. In particular, we would like to see direct links with the Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs and the EU sustainable development strategy, both to be revised in 2010. Measures targeted at transport will also be necessary to achieve the objectives of the EU climate and energy package (reduction of overall emissions of 20%, cutting energy consumption by 20% and increasing the share of renewable energy of 20% by 2020), and the objectives of the new international agreement on climate to be decided in Copenhagen in December 2009. We underline the contribution of local and regional government to the achievement of the objectives of these EU policies.
10. Furthermore, we suggest that the social and territorial cohesion dimension is better reflected in the objectives of the future EU transport policy. Transport plays an important role in the interdependence between urban and rural areas and as factor of intra-regional cohesion. It is essential to improve access to remote or rural areas and to keep the economic attractiveness of secondary centres (e.g. towns in rural areas). Transport is also a useful tool for fostering social inclusion, for instance in ensuring that suburbs or deprived areas are not isolated.
11. CEMR regrets that the environmental impact of transport only arrives in third position in the range of challenges and policy objectives identified in the communication. As underlined by the European Commission, “the environment remains the main policy area where further improvements are necessary” since the progress achieved is still limited. Transport accounts for around a third of all final energy consumption and for more than a fifth of greenhouse gas emissions. It has important responsibility in urban air pollution, noise nuisance, global warming, and negative impacts on landscape, use of natural resources, biodiversity and public health³. Therefore, we advocate for the reduction of the environmental impact of transport to be the main aim of the EU transport policy after 2010.
12. The decoupling of road transport growth from economic growth should consequently remain a priority of EU transport policy in the future and we regret it does not explicitly appear as an objective in the communication. According to a recent report of the European Environmental Agency, freight transport has continued to grow as well as the passengers travel by road and air⁴. We believe this growth in mobility should take the shape of other transport modes than road, and in particular rail, inland waterways,

³ See European Environmental Agency's reports on transport : <http://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/transport>

⁴ Freight transport volumes in tonne-kilometres increased by 35% between 1996 and 2006 and car ownership increased by 22% between 1995 and 2006, according to the EEA report “Transport at crossroads. TERM 2008: indicators tracking transport and environment in the EU (March 2008): <http://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/transport-at-a-crossroads>

public transport and “soft modes” like walking and cycling. This modal shift towards more sustainable modes of transport should concern both freight and passenger transport.

In its guidance document on the public consultation, the European Commission invites stakeholders to suggest policy options on the following issues.

Planning and infrastructures

13. Spatial planning and mobility management, both for passengers and goods, are two interlinked issues where local and regional government have key competences. Their decisions on the location of economic and recreational activities, housing and public services are closely related to decisions on transport organisation. We believe that a wide room for manoeuvre should be left to local and regional authorities to favour a balanced modal split, whilst at the same time planning for the interoperability between different transport modes.
14. CEMR agrees with the European Commission that future policy measures should aim at the development of interoperable and integrated transport networks, including the specificities of urban areas. Solutions developed in cooperation between public and private actors at different levels such as “tram-train” in cities or the development of transshipment intermodal terminals for freight could be further supported. Regarding freight, we recommend greater efforts to be put on the development of rail, fluvial and maritime networks in order to make them competitive with the road, while exploiting the synergies between these transport modes. In particular, we would encourage the pursuit of the development of combined transport and mass freight transport such as the motorways of the sea.
15. The cross-border dimension of interoperability needs to be improved. For instance, cross-border public transport is rather problematic in the EU, with important differences in the service provision, financing methods, technologies, tariffs, timetabling and information systems between the two sides of the borders. Future policy measures could target an improvement of local and regional transport connections in border areas.
16. Moreover, CEMR subscribes to the proposed policy aiming at upgrading and expanding the infrastructure to foster a better integration. We believe that in many cases, the maintenance and modernisation of the existing road infrastructure could be privileged over new expansion. Rather than reducing congestion and time losses, greater offer of roads could indeed create more demand for transport and consequently increase the traffic and serve as arguments for other infrastructure enlargements. We also would like to stress that infrastructure investments represent an important financial commitment for local and regional authorities, with long lasting effects on their budgets.
17. As underlined in the communication, the Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T) policy has reinforced the coordination in the planning of infrastructures projects by the Member States. Next policy measures should ensure the extension of TEN-T to the new Member States, taking into account the impacts on territorial cohesion and urbanisation, and the access for all EU regions to the TEN-T network via secondary links, at national and European planning and financing stages of TEN-T deployment.

Funding and pricing

18. The European Commission recognises that considerable financial resources will be necessary to achieve sustainable transport but that the resources will be difficult to find, especially with the current economic crisis putting public finances under pressure. CEMR supports the idea that all stakeholders at all levels, including users, must

contribute to financing sustainable transport, and points out that the crisis should not serve as an excuse for delaying investments or legislation in favor of a more environmentally sustainable transport. National governments must guarantee important, stable and long-term financing for public transport investments at local, regional and national level. The application of innovative economic instruments can support sustainable urban transport, but not replace public funding.

19. Investing in clean vehicles, building and maintaining infrastructure and developing good-quality public transport at affordable price imply strong financial efforts for local and regional authorities. The latter cover a major part of the costs of public transport since the investment and operating costs are only partially covered by the income (fees paid by users). A tariff increase may not be recommended to keep public transport as a competitive alternative to individual road transport, so that local and regional authorities' capacity to invest is limited.
20. In this context, we appreciate that "sending the right price signal" is one of the policy objectives outlined by the Commission and we fully adhere to the implementation of the principles of "polluter pays" and "user pays" in the transport policy. The EU strategy to internalise the negative costs of transport on the environment and the society is welcome and we call for the adoption of an ambitious directive on the taxation of heavy goods vehicles (so-called Eurovignette directive).
21. New funding tools such as environmental taxes, tax on energy, tax on CO₂ and urban congestion charges can provide additional resources for sustainable transport modes and act as an economic incentive to change behaviours. Further policy measures could explore the implementation of these innovative instruments and deepen the knowledge on the internalisation of environmental and social costs of transport. CEMR believes that the revenues should be used for the financing of infrastructures and the development of environmental-friendly alternatives to individual road transport.
22. The choice of introducing urban road pricing should be the responsibility of the local and regional authorities, which have to assess its benefits and impacts. The EU can help the local decision-makers in organising the exchange of information and experiences on urban road charging. We regret that the Commission set up a joint expert group on transport and environment dealing with the issue of urban road pricing, without having invited associations representing local government to contribute.
23. CEMR welcomes the numerous EU programmes and projects that investigate innovative transport policies and organise exchanges of good practices. In particular, the pursuit of the CIVITAS initiative is appreciated. Considering the ever growing demand for sustainable mobility solutions at local and regional level and that European funds are often decisive for the development of projects that could otherwise not only be financed locally or nationally, we reiterate our call for the creation of a dedicated European fund for local and regional mobility projects. We also expect that the transport issue, identified as key challenge for EU sustainable development⁵, will be adequately taken into account in the review of the EU budget and the future Cohesion policy.
24. The European Investment Bank is currently developing a financial facility called ELENA to support local and regional energy-efficiency and sustainable mobility projects. We welcome the creation of such a tool dedicated to European municipalities and regions but would like to stress that ELENA is aiming very important investments and is not adapted to the size of projects generally developed at local and regional level. Therefore, we would like to encourage the European Commission and the EIB to

⁵ See communication COM(2009)400 on the 2009 review of the EU sustainable development strategy

create financial tools that are also suited to projects developed by smaller and middle-sized local and regional authorities.

Development of low-carbon technologies and R&D

25. Technological developments and innovation are key to meet the transportation challenges. We consider that more attention should be paid to the local and regional dimension of sustainable transport in the priorities of the EU research and innovation policies. We also propose that the EU better support the experimental phases and demonstration projects at local and regional level since they often represent important costs for municipalities and regions.
26. Future priorities for EU research and innovation could further consider the reduction of neglected pollutants or local pollutants like particles and NO_x, bio-fuels and alternative fuels, development of associated fuelling infrastructures and less heavy, less polluting vehicles using safer materials. Furthermore, the development of open interfaces between different technical systems is vital to increase the interoperability between transport modes and contribute to a modal shift.
27. Reliable, attractive and accessible information services are important to favour urban, rural and regional mobility and intermodality. ICT applications are an essential part of the solution to sustainable mobility, since they allow reducing or avoiding transport (e.g. development of teleworking, planning of journeys through Internet, etc.). We welcome the EU support to the deployment of intelligent transport systems and its implementation at local level but we stress that the local and regional authorities should retain the ability to define the content, timing and ambition of ITS deployment in their area.

Development of the EU legislative framework

28. Sustainable transport is a very transversal issue that is addressed in different strategies, legislation and programmes of the EU. As already mentioned, the European Commission should pay more attention to the coherence of the policy measures to be defined in the White paper with closely relating EU-legislation. In particular, we insist on the proper coordination and consistency between policies and financing developed by the different general directions of the Commission (transport and energy, environment, regional policy, internal market, competition, maritime affairs, etc.). This coherence is a pre-requisite for a better comprehension and implementation of EU policies and legislation at local and regional level.
29. In particular, we would like to draw the attention to the risk of negative environmental impacts of EU policies directly or indirectly related to transport and the necessity to carefully assess these impacts. For instance, rail, which is a environment-friendly mode of transport, has a disadvantage compared to aviation due to the emission trading system. Furthermore, the free circulation of so-called “mega-trucks” on European roads would certainly create more pollution and noise and damages on local infrastructures, and prevent the further development of freight rail.
30. CEMR is convinced that measures at sources remain crucial to improve the environmental dimension of transport and directly act on the causes of air pollution, noise, health problems and global warming. Therefore, we support strong EU-wide measures on vehicles emissions, in particular strong EU emission standards on light and heavy vehicles and legislation on CO₂ emissions from cars, vans and trucks. It is essential that the EU further develop ambitious standards and ensure that they are not weakened for the sake of short-term economic consideration and to the detriment of a future low-carbon and energy-efficient economy.

Information and change of behaviour

31. We agree that information and adequate communication is essential for the public acceptance of sustainable mobility solutions. Municipalities and regions, considering their proximity to citizens and their competences regarding mobility and spatial planning, are in a favourable position to stimulate awareness raising and change of behaviour among citizens. Therefore, actions to be taken at EU level could be developed in cooperation with local and regional authorities and representatives of the civil society.
32. The context is beneficial to promote a change of behaviour. We note a growing change of lifestyle among families, youth and urban people, with a higher demand for cycling and walking and the increasing importance of leisure travel, as well as a growing awareness of the risk of climate change.
33. The impact of transport on public health is also an important argument to promote a change of behaviour. On the one hand, air pollution, noise, road accidents caused by transport have direct impacts on the health of individuals. On the other hand, transport modes such as cycling and walking could be a remedy to the lack of physical exercise and related health problems such as overweight and obesity. "Soft measures" play an important role to influence individual transport behaviours. For instance, mobility management is a useful tool that is implemented by many local and regional authorities (e.g. development of employees commuter plans, "pedibus" for school pupils, creation of local mobility advisers, parking management, free park and ride facilities etc.). We welcome the numerous activities of the EU to promote exchange of good practices and campaigns on behavioural changes and believe this could be further developed and facilitated by EU funded networks or projects.
34. Good information provides the basis for individuals and companies to make sound decision regarding their mobility choices and is essential to improve intermodality and the use of public transport. The EU could further support innovation in this field, as well as its implementation at local and regional level. For instance, we would propose the development at European level of a system to inform on comparative levels of emissions of different transport modes or data to measure the environmental impact of a modal shift from road to less polluting modes. Furthermore, manufacturers of road vehicles could be obliged to provide a more exhaustive and better adapted information (e.g. on the pollutants, noise, etc.) emitted by the vehicles they produce, so that potential buyers benefit from clearer and reliable information. This would be particularly useful for local and regional authorities when they organise public procurement.