

Further information

EESC website

<http://www.eesc.europa.eu>

Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN)

<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.ten-section>

Permanent study group "Implementation of the White Paper on Transport"

<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.transports-permanent-study-group>

2011 White Paper – "Roadmap to a Single European Transport Area - Towards a competitive and resource efficient transport system"

http://ec.europa.eu/transport/themes/strategies/2011_white_paper_en.htm

EESC opinions

The impact of the conclusions of COP21 on European transport policy (2016)

<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.ten-opinions.38424>

Internal market of international road freight: social dumping and cabotage (2015)

<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.ten-opinions.36372>

Roadmap to a single European transport area – Progress and challenges (exploratory opinion requested by the European Parliament) (2015)

<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.ten-opinions.34623>

White Paper – "Roadmap to a Single European Transport Area – Towards a competitive and resource efficient transport system" (2011)

<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.ten-opinions.20491>

Related events

EESC public hearing on The impact of the conclusions of COP21 on European transport policy, 4 April 2016

<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.events-and-activities-cop21-transport-impact>

EESC conference on Road transport: social dumping and cross-border infrastructure integration, 11-12 November 2015

<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.events-and-activities-road-transport>

European Commission 2016 Road Transport Conference – Driving change for business and people, 19 April 2016

http://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/road/events/2016-04-19-road-transport-conference_en.htm

European Commission High-Level Conference 2015 – A Social Agenda for Transport, 4 June 2015

http://ec.europa.eu/transport/media/events/2015-06-04-social-agenda-for-transport_en.htm

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European Economic and Social Committee

Road Transport

Position paper – October 2016

Introduction

Road transport is a crucial part of the European Union's single market and of its economy as a whole. At the same time, it is a vital economic sector in its own right, employing about 5 million people across the EU, generating close to 2% of EU GDP, and directly impacting on the quality of life of millions of European citizens. The EU road transport sector has developed significantly over the years, benefiting trade, the economy and freedom of movement. However, the success has had dark sides too and the sector today faces considerable challenges related to road safety and security, the working conditions of professional drivers, and the need to reduce air and noise pollution and the carbon footprint to which road transport significantly contributes¹.

Transport is responsible for 25 % of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions, making it the second-biggest emitting sector after energy generation². If the EU is to achieve targets set in the COP 21 conclusions and its own long-term climate goals, significant reductions in transport emissions are needed. This is particularly true in road transport, which accounts for more than two thirds of transport-related greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

Market access under fair conditions and the social dimension of (road) transport, including combating social dumping, are other topics which now figure high on the EU political agenda.

What the European Union is doing

The aim of the European Union's transport policy is to create conditions in which the road transport sector can operate efficiently, safely and with a minimum impact on the environment³.

Making transport safer and more secure is vital to improve working conditions in the sector. The opening of transport markets in Europe significantly increased competitive pressure on operators and their mobile workers. The EU has therefore established a framework

of social rules for goods and passenger road transport operators with three complementary goals: to ensure the adequate social protection of road transport workers; to guarantee fair competition between undertakings; and to improve road safety by averting road fatigue⁴.

The Paris COP21 resulted in a historic agreement. However, significant efforts will need to be made in the coming years to translate the ambitious commitments into concrete action. In its White Paper on transport (2011) the European Commission already set objectives which are in line with the COP 21 goals (60 % reduction in GHG compared with 1990 levels). This comprehensive strategy also puts forward a set of measures and initiatives to further decarbonise transport in Europe. The Commission reiterated these goals in the 2030 EU climate and energy policy framework (2014), and stated in the Energy Union Package (2015) that the EU needs to speed up decarbonisation in the transport sector. In July 2016 it went on to present a communication on A European strategy for low-emission mobility, indicating how the transport sector can contribute to achieving the 2030 objective of a 30 % reduction and giving Member States and stakeholders guideline on the different options available to achieve that target.

The European Commission has recently organised high-level conferences, bringing together both national and EU-level decision-makers, experts, social partners and other key stakeholders to discuss various aspects of transport. The Road Transport Conference (2016) focused on the road initiatives planned by the European Commission to ensure a well-functioning internal market for road transport, a cleaner environment by decarbonising transport (in particular road transport), and respect for workers' rights. In the conference on A social agenda for transport (2015) important social issues related to transport policy-making came to the fore, in particular preparing the transport workforce of the future, improving employment and working conditions, and getting the social partners more involved in the EU transport policy.

1. Brochure Road transport: a change of gear, European Commission, 2012.

2. European Commission climate action web pages: http://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/international/paris_protocol/transport/index_en.htm

3. European Commission web pages on Promoting efficient, safe and green land transport: http://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/road/index_en.htm

4. European Commission web pages on Road – social provisions: http://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/road/social_provisions/index_en.htm.

Position of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)

The EESC's Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN), and in particular its Permanent Study Group on the Implementation of the White Paper on Transport, is discussing and actively addressing these fundamental developments that will have a profound effect on future EU transport policy.

Social aspects

In its opinion on the Roadmap to a single European transport area – Progress and challenges⁵, the EESC strongly advocates improving social standards, harmonising social and working conditions and combating social and wage dumping as a prerequisite for a transport sector that operates smoothly and on a level playing field. The opinion on Internal market of international road freight: social dumping and cabotage focuses on the need both to combat illegal and fraudulent practices and to ensure adequate enforcement and control, while also calling for the rules on market access in road transport to be clarified and simplified. More specifically, the EESC:

- reiterates its support for the Juncker Commission's objective to fight social dumping as expressed in its 2015 opinion on "Roadmap to a single European transport area", as well as its call for the Commission to propose preventive measures;
- regrets that the notion of social dumping, while extensively used, is not defined. For the purpose of this opinion the EESC considers as social dumping "practices that endeavour to circumvent or are in breach of social or market access regulations (letterbox companies) in order to gain competitive advantages";
- welcomes the Commission's plans: to simplify and clarify EU regulations; to strengthen the establishment criteria to prevent abusive use of "letterbox" companies, as well as plans for a labour mobility package to facilitate the free movement of workers and to improve the Member States' capacity to fight social dumping, fraud and abuse regarding the posting of workers and access to welfare benefits;

- believes that there is an urgent need for EU-level action to avoid the risk of fragmentation of the internal market in road transport through unilateral national measures to combat social dumping. Successful EU action may create favourable conditions for further market opening;
- underlines that reinforced compliance control must not mean disproportionate requirements that hamper normal competition between European transport companies and completion of the internal market in the road transport sector;
- points out that when proposing simplification of market access provisions, including cabotage, the Commission might consider the option of aligning the rules on road freight transport with those applicable to temporary provision of services in general, bearing in mind the specific character of the transport sector. Simplification of market access rules would provide a basis for more coherent enforcement and an enhanced culture of compliance which would limit the possibilities for social dumping. Simplification should be closely linked to vigorous enforcement of decided measures to avoid social dumping;
- asks the Commission and Member States to foster the exchange of information and best practice on effective enforcement to combat abuse and social dumping.

The opinion was presented and served as a basis for debate in a conference on Road transport: social dumping and cross-border infrastructure integration, jointly organised by the European Economic and Social Committee and Luxembourg's Economic and Social Council on the initiative of Luxembourg Presidency (held in Luxembourg on 11-12 November 2015).

Impact of the COP21 conclusions

The COP21 agreement is the first ever to commit all the UN member states to accelerating the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. As transport is one of the sectors producing the most greenhouse gases (road transport is responsible for 71 % of that volume), it will experience radical transformation, affecting all areas of life. In order to engage civil society and discuss ideas on how to steer these fundamental changes in the transport sector, a public hearing was organised by the EESC's TEN section in cooperation with the TRAN Committee of the European Parliament (on 4 April 2016 in Brussels). The outcomes of this event fed into the EESC's own-initiative opinion on The impact of the conclusions of COP21 on European transport policy⁶:

- The EESC welcomes the adoption of the Paris Agreement by the 21st session of the Conference of the Parties (COP21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and of the intended nationally determined contribution of the EU and its Member States, committing to a reduction in domestic greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions of at least 40% by 2030 and by 80 to 95% by 2050 compared to 1990 levels.
- The objective of reducing transport-related GHG emissions by 60% can therefore still be considered to be relevant and in line with the EU's general objective under COP 21, provided the associated actions and initiatives are implemented urgently, with the necessary determination and as soon as possible.
- The EESC stresses that the polluter-pays principle should be applied flexibly, in particular in the context of remote rural, mountain and island areas, in order to avoid effects that are inversely proportional to the costs and in order to ensure that it continues to be useful as a way of influencing choices regarding the organisation of transport operations, while at the same time abolishing any unfair competition between different modes of transport.

- In any event, application of the polluter-pays principle will not be sufficient to guarantee the transition to a low-carbon society, making additional measures – such as increasing energy efficiency, promoting electromobility, car-sharing and comodality, developing alternative energy sources, developing environmental quality standards and, above all, promoting public transport – all the more important.
- It is important not to curb mobility in itself, but to reduce individual motorised journeys where there are viable alternatives and promote public transport, in the general interest of the environment and to avoid cities being suffocated by traffic.
- The mobilisation of civil society organisations and economic and social interest groups seen in relation to COP21 should be maintained, so as to develop a civic movement in favour of climate justice and disinvestment in polluting activities. The EESC therefore recommends undertaking a participatory dialogue with civil society.

5. OJ C 291, 4.9.2015, p. 14.

6. OJ C 303, 19.8.2016, p. 10.