

Intermed proposal for the Trans-European Network to aid the rebalancing and sustainability of the European transport system

Intermed proposes that the European Commission should change the current thrust of the policy behind the Trans-European Network for Transport (TEN-T). The basic aim of the new policy should be to rebalance the TEN-T, in order to encourage the economic rationality and competitiveness of the European Union and make the sustained development of the continental transport system a viable option.

Intermed considers that the actions undertaken under the TEN-T to date have not promoted harmonious development throughout the EU as a whole, nor have they reduced the differences between the regions, both of which are underlying aims of the Trans-European network enshrined in Article 130A of the Treaty of the Union. In fact the inequalities have increased, favouring the concentration of infrastructures and traffic in what we could call the “congested area”, that is, around the ports of the called Northern Range and in the connected Central European regions.

To continue with this policy in favour of the “congested area” would force the financing of very costly infrastructures in the future and also to the earmarking of large sums in order to alleviate the environmental problems caused. Such a situation would be a self-justifying vicious circle. In order to provide transport fluidity and protect the environment, it would be necessary to channel more and more investment into the “congested area”. This is the complete opposite of the meaning of sustainability.

Figures from the last few years indicate that this thinking is not entirely wide of the mark. During the period 1996 -1997, 80% of the total aids granted under the TEN-T to the sea transport mode were assigned to non-Mediterranean European Union member states. Furthermore, while in 1997 there was a confirmation of the very high level of aids granted to the maritime-port sector, more than three quarters of those aids went to non-Mediterranean areas. In addition, it is a well-known fact that the Baltic countries also complain of a lack of attention in the allocation of Community aids. It is therefore quite clear where the resources are being channelled.

For Intermed, this trend will not be corrected by the new proposals on the TEN-T contained in various documents, such as Decision 1692/96, the White Paper on the application of fare payment for infrastructure use or the Green Paper on sea ports, among others.

In sum, the aforementioned documents propose two very contradictory policy approaches on infrastructures –one on investments and another on fare payments-, but with very uneven practical repercussions. The end result would be even more detrimental to areas of the Community such as the Mediterranean, the Baltic and others.

On the one hand, we have the launch of an investment policy –embodied in the proposed revision of Decision 1692/96- which clearly benefits the “congested area” in

the assigning of infrastructures eligible for subsidy. A significant example is map 7.1.0, which shows the proposals for intermodal centres eligible for subsidy, annexed to this note. On the other hand, there is a policy of fare payment which attempts to cover the social costs deriving from the use of the infrastructures and which therefore aspires to slow down congestion and negative environmental impacts.

The problem is that Community investments in the TEN-T will act as direct signals to promote new developments and activities. This will be true to an even greater extent than in the past, if we bear in mind that the subsidy funds will grow from 1.8 billion Euros in the past to 5 the billion Euros earmarked for the period 2000-2006. In view of the map cited above, among others, which show clearly bias of the network, it is clear that investments will continue to flow primarily towards the “congested area”.

With regard to the other element –the common transport infrastructure charging framework-, Intermed has serious doubts (shared by many, including the ESPO) as to how operable and applicable it really is. On the one hand, because of the academic approach adopted by the Commission in the White paper, and on the other because it would appear that the timetable for its application will not begin with the mode that causes the highest external costs –road transport- but, surprisingly, with the sea mode, which is the most compatible with environmental conservation and the one which could contribute in the greatest degree to Community rebalancing.

Intermed considers that, as a result of the unequal results this would provoke, the Mediterranean arc will be doubly harmed. Firstly, because the policy designed will not limit, but rather increase the concentration of infrastructures in the so-called “congested area”, without the compensation provided by user charges being really effective. Secondly, because the new policy on the TEN-T also involves further restrictions on port development, since port expansion infrastructures would no longer be eligible for subsidies. This would be detrimental to the ports integrated into Intermed, which have developed at a slower pace but are now going through a period of strong growth. All these factors would hinder the emergence of other axes to balance the Le Havre-Bremen arc and would only exacerbate the polarisation of traffic flows in the European Union.

In order to avoid such effects, Intermed proposes that the Commission’s TEN-T policy be reformulated bearing in mind the following principles:

- a) The long-term aim of the TEN-T policy should be the rebalancing of the European network in order to guarantee the sustainability of the system and its economic rationality. In the short-term, investment programmes should not increase the current imbalance in the earmarking of Community resources. That is to say, the volume of subsidies assigned to other areas should be greater than those earmarked for the “congested area”, also preventing the TEN-T funds from continuing to be used to compensate northern countries that do not receive aids from other European funds.
- b) A practical way to apply the above mentioned principle would be to draw up another list of priority projects –now that the 14 of the Christophersen Plan are well underway– which would affect the areas not covered by the congested Northern Range area. This list should be drawn up with the aim of fostering the emergence of other axes, such as Barcelona-Marseilles-Genoa, in order to encourage polycentrism in European logistics.
- c) Certain preference should be given in the allocation of TEN-T funds to those projects

linked to ports which, outside the “congested area”, do not act as mere maritime hubs but rather as large distribution centres, as is the case with those integrated into Intermed. First of all, for reasons of consistency with the important recognised role of nodes in the configuration of the TEN-T. Furthermore for reasons of the proximity of these ports to major population centres and economic areas, which allows them to serve more effectively their immediate hinterlands and diversify the accessibility to other European areas which are currently only served from the “congested area”. Finally, owing to the fact that those ports are the intermodal centres in which the principal mode of transport causes a lesser negative impact on congestion and the environment.

In sum, Intermed proposes that the Commission should set up a participative process in order to set the infrastructures policy in a new direction, so that the Trans-European Network can be a genuinely effective way to bring about the rebalancing and sustainability of the European transport system, as stated in the Treaty on the Union and the White Paper on Transport.

March 2001