

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 149 (2004)¹ on problems of transnational transit traffic

The Congress,

1. Having regard to:

- a.* the report on problems of transalpine transit traffic, presented by Mr Luigi Pedrazzini (Switzerland, R) on behalf of the Committee on Sustainable Development;
- b.* earlier texts adopted by the Congress on transport issues, including Resolution 137 (2002) on integrated transport policies and Resolution 220 (1991) on regional transport;
- c.* the White Paper on European transport policy for 2010: time to decide, adopted by the European Commission in September 2001;
- d.* the proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 1999/62/EC on the charging of heavy goods vehicles for the use of certain infrastructures (the Eurovignette Directive);
- e.* the Final Declaration of the Conference on Sustainable development of mountain regions, European transit policy and the challenge of globalisation (Cavalese, Italy, 17 June 2003), which stresses that transit traffic should not pose an unacceptable threat to the environment of the regions concerned;

2. Considering that:

- a.* traffic congestion on main European transversals has been increasing for years without any appropriate remedial action being taken;
- b.* annual increases in freight transport in Europe, at around 4%, are approximately double the annual economic growth rate;
- c.* for years there has been total imbalance in the development of land transport (road and rail) in Europe: in contrast to large increases in road transport, rail transport has actually decreased to 15% of freight traffic in the European Union;
- d.* particularly in sensitive parts of transalpine corridors, maximum capacity in terms of traffic safety and environmental impact has already been reached;
- e.* too little heed is paid to growing – and justified – concern about the environmental effects of transport, particularly road transport;

3. Noting that, in contrast to the European trend, rail carries a high proportion (40%) of transalpine freight, and commitment to transport efficiency in the Alps is reflected in efforts to improve operating conditions in rail transport, producing a significant modal shift to rail;

4. Bearing in mind that:

- a.* lorry emission of nitrogen oxides in sensitive parts of Alpine corridors has been steadily increasing;
- b.* large increases in traffic volume have so far not been counterbalanced by improved engine technology in lorry transport;
- c.* lorry No_x emission in actual traffic conditions with the newer Euro II and Euro III vehicles has not decreased as much as limit values recorded in prototype testing suggested;
- d.* in mountain valleys, as a result of topography and climate (for example, frequency of temperature inversions.), tolerance limits are reached more quickly than in flat or hilly country;
- e.* owing to the multiplicity of uses in mountain valleys (settlement, economic activity, transport and recreation) being concentrated in an extremely confined area alongside landscape features that play a protective role, there is a much greater likelihood of use conflict;

5. Convinced that:

- a.* reliable transport links are of particular importance in achieving a fully integrated Europe;
 - b.* efficient transport infrastructure is of fundamental importance to present-day societies and national economies;
 - c.* in freight transport decisions, priority between choice of transport mode and the requirements of health protection must be given to protecting the health of the local population;
 - d.* measures geared to each region are indispensable if there is to be a uniform standard of protection and security for all Europeans;
 - e.* part of the cost of major transport infrastructure projects (such as the Brenner base tunnel and the Lyon-Turin rail link) needs to be met by private investment, and transport policy must create suitable incentives for this;
6. Concerned that the draft amendments to the Eurovignette Directive (1999/62/EC) are inadequate to give sensitive Alpine areas the necessary protection,
7. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe call on the governments of Alpine member states to:
- a.* introduce means of taxing road freight transport on a flexible basis, differentiating according to the features of the regions affected and the type of traffic. The tax should provide a strong incentive to transfer long-distance freight from road to rail without unduly penalising internal freight.

The tax should be introduced progressively, with increases clearly scheduled (dates, amount of increase and final level), to ensure that the market incorporates the tax into its development strategy;

b. promote the shortest-route principle by harmonisation of tariffs and of general transport rules applying to transalpine freight traffic. To discourage lengthy detours it is essential to ensure that charges for the Alpine sections of the different transalpine corridors are comparable;

c. introduce a set of instruments, co-ordinated at European level, to manage road traffic across the Alps in accordance with the principle adopted for managing scarce resources. This would saddle road transport with more constraints and therefore make it somewhat less attractive. Particularly in sensitive regions, lorry transit will have to be restricted. Instruments of this kind, which will restrict the freedom of movement of road transport, will serve as indirect incentives to transport goods by rail;

d. finance railway infrastructure to cope with the difficult conditions specific to the Alps without expecting any return on their investment. It is not a question of wasting public money, but of an investment which, although not directly profitable, will help to make the railways more competitive and make it easier to transfer goods from the roads to the railways. Taxing road transport should be a means of financing investment in rail infrastructure and facilities;

e. standardise and harmonise the technical and administrative aspects of rail traffic to make the various national rail networks more integrated and more open;

f. implement a strategic change in the management of rail freight, which should be modelled on passenger traffic management so as to reproduce the advantages of road freight. The carrier should be able to have clear departure and arrival times for the goods, so that the just-in-time method can also be used with rail transport;

8. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe call on the European Union to:

a. amend directive 1999/62/EC as soon as possible. Provision for cross-financing of alternative modes of transport in sensitive regions is of prime importance for creating major rail links through the Alps. The proportion of road tolls to be used for cross-financing should be set flexibly, according to the urgency and importance of the

particular project in Europe, but with an upper limit of 30%;

b. internalise external costs as much as possible by means of a new Eurovignette Directive (superseding directive 1999/62/EC) so as to reverse the modal breakdown of freight transport in Europe;

c. develop additional strategies for restricting lorry traffic in sensitive areas. Vehicle-technology measures on their own will not suffice to meet environmental and limit-value targets for transversals that go through the Alpine valleys;

d. develop instruments to channel transalpine freight traffic, ensuring that they fit in with present regulations on the various aspects of lorry transport through the Alps. A market-based approach in line with proper management of scarce resources should be developed and include measures such as reservation systems, an Alpine transit exchange and trade in emission rights. Tools of this kind should be developed by the European Commission in collaboration with countries affected;

e. further liberalise rail transport and concomitantly continue opening up the networks. Guidelines should be issued on technical and administrative harmonisation in rail matters;

9. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

a. transmit to the governments the proposals contained in paragraph 7 of the present recommendation;

b. transmit to the European Parliament and to the European Commission the proposals contained in paragraph 8 of the present recommendation;

c. examine the possibility of convening a Conference of Ministers responsible for transport and environment of the countries concerned by transalpine transit, in close co-operation with the European Union and the European Conference of Ministers of Transport (ECMT), aimed at better management of transalpine traffic through increased use of rail transport. The Congress could organise the participation of Alpine regions.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 27 May 2004, 3rd Sitting (see Document CG (11) 6, draft recommendation presented by L. Pedrazzini (Switzerland, R, NR), rapporteur).