Improving the connection and accessibility of the transport infrastructure in central and eastern Europe

2015/2347(INI) - 06/10/2016 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Transport and Tourism adopted an own-initiative report by Tomasz Piotr PORBA (ECR, PL) on improving the connection and accessibility of the transport infrastructure in Central and Eastern Europe.

The report stressed the need to **enhance the connectivity and accessibility of the infrastructure for transport to, from and within the central and eastern parts of the EU**, taking into account the needs of the economy and the principles of sustainable development.

Transversal aspects: the TEN-T objectives consist of bridging missing links, removing bottlenecks and ensuring seamless connections for long-distance and regional transport, particularly in cross-border regions, for passengers and freight.

Members considered that the use of **EU funding must reflect the real investment needs for completing the TEN-T core network by 2030 in the region**. Moreover, the EU should not only create new infrastructure but also invest in the modernisation and completion of existing transport infrastructures.

Members welcomed the completion of the initial TEN-T core corridor work plans of 2015 and the adoption of the new maps further extending the TEN-T network to the countries of the Western Balkans. They stressed that the implementation of the core network should also stimulate the development of the comprehensive network, in particular for connections that have cross-border relevance and have an impact on the consolidation of corridors.

The report also stressed the need to:

- establish a **new European corridor** that links the Venice port hub directly with north-eastern Europe, by strengthening the current TEN-T;
- underline the importance of **coordinated project planning** by and among Member States;
- improve **coordination among European and national authorities**, especially with regard to the realisation of the core part of the TEN-T network while taking account of the specific challenges in the Member States;
- make **better use of existing policies and instruments for regional cooperation**, such as European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), Interreg and especially European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs), to enhance cross-border transport between regions and remove bottlenecks;
- develop **transport hubs** to be a key element for interlinking long-distance, regional and urban transport, thus promoting efficiency, intermodality and regional business development;
- ensure **synergies and mutual complementarity of funding** under the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI), the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance and instruments of the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) when implementing transport infrastructure projects in the central and eastern EU;
- use the means of the **European Fund for Strategic Investments** (EFSI) in a timely manner to advance commercially viable market-based projects;

- use the ESI Funds to **increase the administrative capacity** of the intermediate bodies and beneficiaries;
- pay attentions to east-**west and north-south transport corridors** within the European TEN-T network;
- ensure the integration of the **Western Balkans accession countries** into the TEN-T network and the cooperation on transport links with Ukraine, Moldova and other neighbouring countries.

Member States are encouraged to make use of **public-private partnerships** where appropriate, which can be an advantageous way of investing in infrastructure, in particular as regards the implementation of complex infrastructure projects requiring extensive expenditure.

Moreover, cooperation under the **macro-regional strategies** of the EU, using innovative governance mechanism, could help to tackle transport policy issues which cannot be solved by Member States individually.

Road transport: the Commission and the Member States are asked to address the urgent need to enhance the road infrastructure network along the eastern border of the EU, starting in Estonia, passing through Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria and ending in Greece.

Such efforts should build on the long-standing planning done already under the **Via Carpatia** project. Members considered that the possibility of opening the Rhine-Danube corridor to the north of the EU through the Via Carpatia should be exploited and that Via Carpatia should receive a **proper budget allocation**.

Member States are called upon to continue modernising roads, to continue developing missing links, to build safe and accessible parking lots and to strengthen regional and local connectivity to the TEN-T network. Road safety should also be assessed when constructing road infrastructure.

Rail transport: the report stressed the priority of constructing, modernising and maintaining railway lines for the coherent, sustainable growth of rail transport and cohesion in the central and eastern parts of the EU. Members States are called upon to **(re-)establish missing connections and to remove bottlenecks**. Members called on the Commission to continue supporting investment in rolling stock in Central and Eastern European countries.

Members underlined the common benefits of the **Rail Baltica link** as one of the priority projects in the North Sea-Baltic Corridor and its significant strategic importance for all the Member States involved, as well as for the whole region from Finland (with the possible 'Bothnian extension'), through Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and on to Germany, the Netherlands and southern Europe.

Inland waterways: the report highlighted the importance of inland waterway transport as a cost-effective and sustainable means for multimodal transport and for logistics across the EU.

Members underscored the **role of the Danube River as the key transport waterway** in the Danube macro-region. They noted that the region's potential for inland waterway transport ought to be further utilised and invited the riparian states to ensure the **continuous navigability** of the Danube, while taking the environmental aspects into account.

Maritime ports and airports: the report underlined the potential for further developing attractive shipping to ports in the Baltic, Black, and Adriatic Seas in the context of the 'Motorways of the Sea' concept. It pointed out that sustainable port development in the Baltic, Adriatic and Black Seas **must not be impeded by other undersea infrastructure**.

Northern Adriatic ports must strengthen their cooperation through regional coordination for the common promotion of traffic flows for maritime trade in the North Adriatic and to fully integrate the Italian ports with those of Slovenia (Koper) and Croatia (Rijeka). The Commission is called upon to **include the port of Rijeka in the Baltic-Adriatic corridor** in order to enable the full transport connection of northern Adriatic sea ports towards Central Europe and the Baltic Sea.

The Commission should **examine air connectivity** in and between Member States and to establish measures to improve air transport services in terms of quality of services for consumers.

Members noted the enormous potential that small and medium-sized airports have in terms of transport accessibility in Central and Eastern Europe and stressed the contribution regional airports make to increasing the attractiveness of their regions.

Members maintained that for any new facilities, traffic demand and potential must be duly assessed and use of EU funds strictly limited to economically viable and sustainable projects.