

Towards Future-proof Inland Waterway Transport (IWT) in Europe

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The European Parliament adopted by 641 votes to 7, with 45 abstentions, a resolution setting out the path towards future-proof inland waterway transport in Europe.

Inland waterway transport is an essential pillar in the shift towards multimodal sustainable transport. Inland waterways currently represent a very small share of freight transport in the EU (6.1 %), while road has a 76.3 % share and rail 17.6 %. A sharp increase is needed to reduce road congestion, enhance safety, reduce emissions and ensure a more sustainable transport system as a whole.

Modal shift in freight: from road to inland waterways

Parliament called on the Commission to take the initiative on **green, efficient and digital leadership** and to build on existing programmes such as NAIADES, which should support and incentivise all stakeholders within the waterway transport sector, as well as other transport modes, in particular rail.

The Commission should therefore:

- present proposals for a governance and regulatory framework in line with the forthcoming NAIADES action programme, ensuring Europe-wide harmonisation and standardisation for navigability, vessels and crew qualifications;
- regularly evaluate its modal shift goals for inland waterway transport and promote the adoption of best practices on integrating inland waterway transport services into multimodal logistics chains;
- facilitate the exchange of best practices between Member States to enable high quality navigability and facilitate modal shift, while respecting biodiversity concerns and applicable environmental law.

Member States are invited to fulfil their obligation to complete the TEN-T core network for inland waterways by 2030, to eliminate missing links, to address bottlenecks and to promote high-quality physical and digital infrastructure.

Greening inland waterway transport

The resolution highlighted the importance of tackling the energy transition in a cost-efficient and accessible way, while recognising the diverse range in types of vessels, by quickly stepping up the availability and rollout of a heterogeneous mix of clean alternative fuels, alternative fuel infrastructure and propulsion methods for shipping with a network approach and in accordance with the principle of technological neutrality. An energy transition in inland navigation is key to attaining the climate-neutral agenda by 2050.

The Commission is called on to:

- develop a realistic roadmap to further reduce pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions in order to achieve a decarbonised inland waterway sector, while safeguarding competitiveness, reliability and safety;

- encourage the use of available financial instruments that promote the use of alternative sustainable fuels and technologies;
- assess the possibility of devising an EU emissions labelling scheme for inland waterway transport.

Digitalisation and autonomous shipping

Digitalisation could bring significant benefits in terms of safety and energy efficiency for the collection and analysis of data on the inland waterway transport sector, contributing to further emissions reduction.

Parliament called for a strategy to develop and deploy digital and automated technologies in the inland waterway sector, which should outline both interoperable standards across modes and borders and the requisite research actions and funding.

The Commission should:

- ensure a harmonised digital use and acceptance of electronic crew and vessel documents throughout the EU;
- come up with an intermodal overview of the flow of goods and containers that enter Europe and the routes taken by the goods to their end destination;
- present an EU action plan for the digital infrastructure of multimodal transport that enables data sharing and interoperability, with the goal of achieving a synchromodal, connected and automated transport system by 2035 at the latest.

Dedicated EU inland waterway fund

The resolution stressed that the path towards a climate-neutral inland waterway sector and the desired energy transition will create a funding gap approaching EUR 10 billion, which cannot be financed by the sector alone.

The Commission is called on to set up a dedicated EU inland waterway fund for the sustainable transition, including a one-stop-shop system that is easily accessible for help and assistance and has the possibility to combine projects into a single application, thus increasing the chances for funding.

This dedicated fund should leverage further investments from the industry and focus on ship retrofitting and renewal in order to improve the energy efficiency of ships and support investments in innovative and energy-saving technologies as well as port infrastructure, notably the deployment of alternative fuels.

Passenger transport, urban mobility, waterborne city logistics and tourism

Member States and cities are encouraged to include, where possible, waterborne public transport, city logistics and local freight distribution as a safe, sustainable and effective mode of transport in their sustainable urban mobility planning and to enhance their urban mobility data collection. The Commission is called on to include inland waterway tourism in its upcoming European Agenda for Tourism 2050 taking into account the economic benefits of river tourism in port regions in terms of added value, employment creation and port revenues.

Lastly, Parliament stressed the need to further explore the potential of inland waterways for recreational navigation and other waterfront activities, which would boost growth, create new job opportunities and enhance tourism in the regions concerned.

