Transport policy: proposals and action programme for 2010. White Paper

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PURPOSE: An examination of the European Union's common transport policy with a view to modernising transport policy by 2010. CONTENT: The long awaited White Paper on the European transport policy is a comprehensive analysis of existing transport policies whilst offering alternative solutions to the maintenance, modernisation and future efficiency of the EU's common transport policy. Largely neglected for the first thirty years of the Community's existence, transport policy came in to its own following the signing of the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992. Vital to the smooth functioning of the internal market, Member States began to acknowledge the importance of establishing an efficient, equally distributed mode of transport from the centre to the periphery. Since the publication of the Commission's first White Paper on Transport in 1992 much has been achieved, but as the latest White Paper notes much remains to be done. The guiding principle behind the 1992 White Paper was the opening up of the Community's transport market. Other than in the railway sector this has largely been accomplished. Other accomplishments include road cabotage becoming a reality, the opening up of the air industry to competition, the opening of Spata airport, the high-speed train from Brussels to Marseille and the Oresund bridge-tunnel linking Denmark and Sweden. In spite of these successes a number of urgent issues need to be addressed within the transport sector. First and foremost is the problem of congestion and the effect this has on the imbalance between modes of transport. According to the White Paper some 10% of the road network is affected by daily traffic jams. Further, some 20% of the railways are classed as bottleneck. Sixteen of the Union's main airports recorded delays of more than a quarter of an hour on more than 30% of their flights. Altogether these delays result in consumption of an extra 1.9 billion litres of fuel, which is some 6% of annual consumption. To add to the problem, growth in transport is expected to increase considerably over the coming years. Worryingly, the White Paper estimates that heavy goods vehicle traffic alone will increase by nearly 50% over its 1998 level. Indeed the White Paper remarks that it is imperative that over the coming ten years the Community focus its attention to shifting traffic off the roads and into other modes of transport - primarily the railways but also through the use of shipping and /or inland waterways. These latter three modes of transport have been neglected both by industry and national governments and the Commission's strategy is now to redress this imbalance. Shifting both passengers and goods transport into alternative modes is not impossible. In Europe rail freight services represents a mere 8% of the total; in the USA goods carried by rail represents 40% of the total. In order to tackle the problem head on the Commission proposes introducing a number of measures ranging from pricing to revitalising alternative modes of transport as well as offering targeted investment in the trans-European network. All in all the White Paper proposes some 60 specific measures to be taken at Community level, including an action programme extending until 2010. A mid-term review in 2005 will assess whether the precise targets of these programmes are being attained. In essence these proposals include: - revitalising the railways; - improving the quality in the road transport sector; - promoting transport bysea and inland waterway; - striking a balance between growth in air transport and the environment; - turning intermodality into reality; - building the trans-European transport network; - improving road safety; - adopting a policy on effective charging for transport; - recognising the rights and obligations of users; - developing high-quality urban transport; - putting research and technology at the service of clean, efficient transport; - managing the effects of globalisation; - and lastly, developing medium and long-term environmental objectives for a sustainable transport system.