Regional policy, transport and structural policy: improvingsocial cohesion, competitiveness and development

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OBJECTIVE : Commission Communication on the role of transport in efforts to reduce regional and social disparities in the European and in strengthening its economic and social cohesion. CONTENT : the objective of the Communication is to consider ways in which the Common Transport Policy (CTP) and EU structural policies financed by the Structural and Cohesion Funds can promote a more balanced and sustainable development of the Union's territory, in particular by improving the situation of peripheral or weaker regions and disadvantaged social groups. The Communication suggests ways in which efforts in the CTP and structural policy fields can be combined to make a more effective contribution to the development of the weaker regions and the opportunities available to disadvantaged groups and hence to improving economic and social cohesion. A number of concrete recommendations are made for the development of the European transport system, focusing on the achievement of the following objectives : - improving regional economic development prospects, competitiveness and employment; - contributing to balanced development in the Fifteen and creating conditions favourable to the integration of new Member States; - promoting sustainable mobility and ensuring the availability of transport services to those without the use of private cars and those with impaired mobility. The long term link between levels of economic development and transport is generally uncontested. An efficient European transport system is essential for economic development and to enable citizens, economic operators and regional and local communities to derive full benefit from an area without internal frontiers. It is clear that investment in transport alone will not lead to the reduction of development disparities. The success of improvements in transport depends on complementary efforts to ensure that the disadvantaged regional economies are in a better position to seize the opportunities created. Transport can contribute to employment in a number of ways : investment in transport infrastructure contributes to employment in both the long run and the short run. While the short-term boost to employment that arises from the construction phase is welcome, it is not the primary objective of investment in transport infrastructure, which is to secure long-run gains in the form of increased competitiveness and the creation of durable employment. In the context of the regional programmes, therefore, a careful assessment has to be made of the contribution of investment in transport to competitiveness and employment compared to alternative investments in fields such as SMEs, R&D and human resources. Efficient transport systems are considered essential for the operation of the labour market to ensure the widest access of workers to employment. It is increasingly recognised that provision for non-private car users is fundamental in this respect, as well as having important efficiency and environmental benefits. The key concern here is often not the provision of new transport infrastructure, but the provision of transport services (particularly public transport). Since 1989, the Structural and Cohesion Funds have been a major source of finance in the development of Europe's transportinfrastructure, while contributing to improving the accessibility of its peripheral and remote regions, although catching up will remain a long-term challenge. It is, nevertheless, recognised that the transport needs of the weaker regions of the EU are not the same as those of the stronger regions; it is neither necessary nor desirable to seek to reproduce the transport systems of the latter in the former, for example, with regard to the balance between the different modes. The reduction of the less favourable environmental impacts of transport and the promotion of a shift towards the more environmentally friendly modes of transport must also be encouraged in the peripheral and remote areas. The Commission identifies three ways forward : - maximising the effectiveness of the Community's contribution by strengthening the leverage effect of EU grants under the Structural and Cohesion Funds and the TEN budget, promoting a balanced approach to transport infrastructure priorities and properly taking into

account trans-regional effects, and improved co-ordination between the Community budget instruments. - linking up the Union by implementing the TEN and extending it in an enlarged Union. - promoting accessible, sustainable transport services.