

KNV views on the EC Communication "The future of European Transport, a sustainable future for transport; towards an integrated, technology-led and user friendly system".

How can Europe find a balance in economic growth, growth of transport volumes and negative effects on the environment? As described in the White book on the EU transport policy in 2001 and as believed for several years in the European Union and its member states, economic growth should be uncoupled from the growth in transport volumes and mobility. In the update of the White book on the EU transport policy in 2006 the objective was already adjusted. The ideal should be to uncouple economic growth from the growth in negative effects caused by transport.

In past years an annual growth in GDP of around 2.3% has been accompanied by a growth in freight volumes of 2.8%, while growth in passenger mobility more or less kept pace with the growth in GDP. In the Transvisions study made for the EC and published in March 2009 a forecast until 2030 is made, which foresees that freight volumes and passenger mobility will grow with 1.3 and 1.6 % respectively. The study indicates that for the first time in decades growth in transport is going to lag behind growth of GDP. The study calls the effect 'dematerialisation' of the economy.

It strikes KNV that the Communication emphasises the integration of various transport modes, the central role of the users and spatial planning. The logic behind the emphasised subjects follows from EC views on pricing of transport.

Users and the rationale behind pricing

The explanation on the principle of pricing (paragraphs 55-56) explains EC's view on the central role of the users. Smart and correct pricing for all modes and means of transport should enable transport operators and their customers to make the right choice just by opting for the cheaper solution. KNV is glad that the Commission abandons the old modal shift policy based on policy measures, and replaces it by a policy based on prices which correctly reflect internal and external costs. EC expects the users to behave economically, i.e. to make smart use of scarce commodities.

Correct pricing of transport and internalisation of external costs

KNV is glad that the Communication acknowledges (paragraph 55) that so far many of the internal costs of transport are not yet reflected in transport prices. As long as major cost factors are not priced, the internalisation of (marginal) external costs can not be an effective policy instrument for making users choose the most economical transport solutions. Before the discussion on internalisation of external costs is resumed, the pricing of internal costs needs to be resolved for all transport modes.

Integration of transport modes

When all internal and external costs are consistently included in the prices, all forms of transport will become more expensive and hence a more scarce commodity. This will have as overall effect that users will consume less transport services and think better about the optimal mix of transport means. KNV therefore shares the view that the integration of various transport modes must be promoted and welcomes EC efforts to this effect.

Spatial planning

Remarkable is the reference made to spatial planning in the Communication (paragraphs 58-61). The role and mandate of European institutions in spatial planning is a politically

sensitive subject. However, the impact of planning on growth in transport volumes and mobility is undeniable and can not be ignored. KNV therefore supports EC in its view that planning should be optimised through a correct pricing system for transport. KNV stresses that in the development of infrastructure it will also be a challenge to balance European, national and local interests. Investments in transport have different benefits and costs for different interest groups. The tendency will be for local interest groups to strive for the best connections with other parts of Europe, but with minimal investments in their own region. The challenge will be to balance local, national and European interest taking into consideration all benefits and costs including external effects.