GOBIERNO DE ARAGON

THE GOVERNMENT OF ARAGON'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEBATE ON THE FUTURE TRANS-EUROPEAN TRANSPORT NETWORK POLICY

On 4th May 2010, the European Commission launched a new public consultation on the future Trans-European Transport network policy. This review is part of a broader initiative, linked to the preparation of the White Paper on future transport policies. The White Paper will establish the Common Transport Policy and general aspects of the future TEN-T policy.

The European Commission considers that the TEN-T policy should be modernised to enable the EU to better harness its resources for the implementation of strategic projects with high European added value and to mitigate the effects of the bottlenecks that are critical for the internal market, particularly cross-border sections and intermodal nodes (cities, ports and logistics platforms). In addition, the Commission pays particular attention to environmental challenges and climate change as well as to the sustainability of the integral transport system, focusing on the use of more efficient alternative energies.

The European Commission, the Member States, MEP's and stakeholders have also had the opportunity to discuss these proposals on the TEN-T days that the European Commission organised together with the Spanish Presidency in Zaragoza, capital of the Autonomous Community of Aragon, on 8th and 9th June, 2010.

The aim of this document is to outline the main issues, major needs and key guidelines which the Government of Aragon believes should be included in the TEN-T policy, for the European Commission to use as a reference guide to be taken into account in its future communications.

Before analysing the different points of the working paper of the European Commission, it is necessary to highlight the great work done by this institution

and the various expert groups that have analysed the main aspects for the review of the TEN-T. The Government of Aragon shares many of the conclusions that have been discussed in these forums and takes them on as its own, as reflected in this contribution.

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I. INTRODUCTION.

II. THE GREEN PAPER FOLLOW-UP

One aspect emphasized first in the working document of the European Commission is the need for coherence of the TEN-T policies with other European policies, whether relating to transport or to other sectors. The "Europe 2020" strategy is a laudable goal, shared by the Government of Aragon. To this end, we share the aim of using new and more effective technologies in order to reduce emissions in the most polluting sectors, such as road transport. It is also important to support the development of less polluting modes such as rail transport.

The situation of the railway sector in Spain and Aragon is particularly deficient, which seriously impairs the possibility of having a sustainable transport system. Both the Spanish Government and the different Autonomous Communities make a major effort to change this situation promoting the use of rail transport. In addition to measures to improve the service, investment in infrastructure is still necessary, as it is much less efficient than in other EU countries. Therefore EU support, both in its general transport policy, and in the TEN-T strategies, is very important for the completion of an effective system that includes not only services but also competitive infrastructure.

A concept often repeated in the document of the European Commission and which we believe to be essential as a basis for the TEN-T methodology is the European added value. This value should help to define the key points of the trans-European network, and should serve not only to ensure a coherent and effective system, but also as a counterbalance to those situations in which the Member States, independently, do not quite ensure a European “whole”. The border effect often means that the needs of border areas have not the same consideration as the central areas in a State, where investment is much more concentrated.

This is where the European institutions can really complete the national activities and ensure the coherence of projects. The special attention given to cross-border sections and intermodal nodes is exactly right in our opinion.

The general objective of the core network is to highlight the "European added value" of the TEN-T. This is defined as a benefit that goes beyond those achieved nationally and includes not only economic benefits but also those resulting from cohesion, the environment and safety areas. We completely agree with this European perspective indicated by the Commission.

Of course, it is necessary to work on a more integrated transport system. It needs to be multimodal in terms of nodes and corridors, covering those parts of the global network that are of strategic importance to the European Union. But the development of intermodality should not serve to justify an end to the investment and implementation of infrastructure that are still needed to create a network, and in particular of some cross-border sections and bottlenecks that ensure this important European added value. Modality and technology are important, but we must not forget that the basis has to be effective infrastructure.

As for the proposed options and the choice in favour of a "core network" we feel that this can help to structure the trans-European networks, provided that the existing priority projects are maintained, bearing in mind that these projects have already demonstrated their important role in the implementation of an efficient European transport system. The future network must be based on these 30 projects that have already been agreed upon and approved.

Given that the orientation of the European Commission is to concentrate the financial and non-financial instruments on this central network, it is important to pay special attention to the special cross-border sections and bottlenecks, which are those that give a significant added value to the EU.

The concept of cohesion is also important, it has re-emerged with more force after the latest communications from the European Commission, which we applaud and support as a good decision. On the basis of sustainable competitiveness, cohesion is an essential aspect that the European Union should deal with in particular. It is one of the main factors contributing to consolidate the concept of "European added value." We are especially pleased that territorial cohesion has been included, which in the past has been addressed less than economic or social cohesion, and which should be considered as a territorial planning element of the EU. Cohesion is important, always bearing in mind the market criteria, and it is the supranational vision which should help in this regard. When defining projects, it is necessary to analyse the cost-benefit ratio, but also take into account the effects on spatial planning, traffic, and the environment.

Once again, we highlight the good work already undertaken by groups of experts that were created on an "ad hoc" basis for the review of the TEN-T. A methodology based on the criteria of transnational flows, cohesion and regional planning, economic development, relations with third countries and the environment, undoubtedly contributes to have a general overview which is what the EU needs.

In this regard, the conclusions of group 1 have exposed an issue that for us is fundamental, and which we would like to be considered prior to analysing the document: When talking about priorities, whether priority projects or networks, this does not mean that these issues need to be addressed more urgently than others, it simply means that, as priorities, they are of strategic importance for the EU and the important added value we have repeatedly mentioned.

That’s why the corridors that should be reflected in the TEN-T should be aimed at creating a whole network, that is effective, coherent and complete, as well as being environmentally friendly, although this involves setting up longer-term projects.

It is important to find immediate solutions to some transport problems, but we can not deny that the current system has some shortcomings that can not be resolved immediately. They must be incorporated into a global strategy with phased implementation, which in the short term will take steps in the right direction but without forgetting other investments that need to be distributed over time. As the actual work group nº1 states, "The Core Network represents a long-term target, affordable over time that can give a stable orientation to its step-by-step implementation."

Not only must we take into account existing demands, but it is also necessary to predict future demands, and this requires a great deal of research, planning and implementation staged over time. A policy, a long-term view that at the same time responds to current needs. That is the goal the TEN-T must pursue.

III. TEN-T PLANNING METHODOLOGY

We must stress that, if the distinction between a “core network” and a “comprehensive network” is eventually made, it is necessary to start from the basis of the priority projects already approved within the trans-European transport networks. They have already shown their consistency with the criteria considered by the European Commission as fundamental to this review, and are supported by government of Aragon: Effects on global flows and relations with neighbouring countries, territorial cohesion, economic development, environmental respect and European added value, which are specially reflected in the cross-border sections and bottlenecks.

Planning the comprehensive network

The establishment of a comprehensive network, according to the document of the European Commission, responds to the need to provide a basis for European territorial planning, standardisation and the application of various EU policies. We believe it is important to have an instrument of this kind, which should always be linked to the initiatives undertaken by ESPON, which should be the real planning framework.

Given that this network will not serve as a reference to funding, but only to the management, planning and coordination, it should be as exhaustive as possible, and as stated in the document it should duly connect all the regions of the EU. Therefore, when discussing the criteria and conditions for planning the Global Network, we believe that not only the States concerned should be taken into account, but also the regional and local authorities that have the best knowledge of the territory and can collaborate in setting up a framework that is as effective and thorough as possible.

Planning the core network

According to the European Commission document the Core Network consists of nodes and links of the highest strategic and economic importance for the entire EU, including new infrastructure elements that are essential to the objectives of the transport policy and other sectors. In our opinion, these new elements, which must be based on the existing 30 priority projects, must have clear European added value, as advocated by the Commission itself, which is given by dealing with cross-border links or resolving the large bottlenecks in Europe.

It is difficult to establish a methodology that covers all the criteria. In any case the criteria that should prevail are the European added value and the balance between cohesion and profitability (for example, with similar options, the one that best aids cohesion should be chosen) . Free market access for all citizens must remain at the centre of this policy. In any case, this methodology should not only concentrate on the cost-benefit analysis, this criterion alone does not meet all the expectations of the Commission or of the institutions concerned.

Also, connections with third countries must be taken into account, not only from the standpoint of the continuity of the network by means of physical connections at the border. If we want the European Union to continue to have effective exchange and cooperation relations with the rest of the world, we need to have good reception and transmission channels. In this regard, European ports play a vital role in the international relations of the EU, that's why we have to optimise their functioning and continuation inland.

Necessary investment

The European Commission document also indicates that this core network does not imply a new programme of large-scale infrastructure. It also includes among its general principles minimising investment, maintenance and operation costs, with respect to the criteria and policy objectives set later. We stress the importance of these criteria and objectives, which are not only political but also

economic. Sometimes they engage large investments, which are profitable over time. The current financial situation can lead to an excessive restriction on investment, which is not wise. That is something to be avoided, taking into account the strong connection between certain infrastructures and market efficiency, territorial cohesion and global growth of the EU. This long-term strategic view should prevail over the circumstantial lack of current resources, since we are proposing a planning and management tool that extends over time and aims to serve the European transport system in the long term.

For good territorial integration, stable cohesion, efficient internal market, consolidating interconnectivity and multimodality, and in short, to respond to the needs of users, goods and people, it is still necessary to maintain investments in infrastructures that do not yet exist and are the only ones that can ensure a continuous, stable transport network that is environmentally friendly.

While much has been achieved in many territories of Europe, some areas still suffer from many shortcomings, such as the Pyrenees. This is a sensitive environment that continually suffers the consequences of a very large amount of traffic of people and goods by road, with the serious environmental consequences that implies. In addition to this, there is a borderline of over 150 kilometres between Spain and France without an efficient connection, which is a serious hindrance to principles that inspire the balanced and fair functioning of EU internal market. This kind of imbalances shows clearly that we still need to invest in infrastructures in some especially sensitive places, with high socio-economic impact for the EU, always following the criteria of competitiveness, and environmental respect.

In this context, we add that, although multimodality is essential for the future of the network, (in Aragon we strongly support any initiative concerning this), it is not the only solution to the communication problems in Europe. The development of intermodal transport must be accompanied by effective infrastructure wherever necessary. For example, if we work to achieve a more balanced modal distribution, in favour of more sustainable modes such as

railway, on the Iberian Peninsula railway will have to be ready to cope with the increased capacity they will have to face in the next future. The Spanish government is already working on this, but in any case, there will still be a bottleneck at the border between Spain and France, caused by the serious lack of sustainable cross-border infrastructure.

Node designation

We believe that the determination of the network is correct, based on key nodes, both capitals of Member States and other cities that are important from different points of view. In this regard, as the European Commission well knows, Aragon is a region that has positioned itself for several years as a reference node for transport and logistics, with an unbeatable strategic location and modern and sized facilities to meet the current and future demand.

In this regard, we must mention the logistics platform of Zaragoza, PLAZA, in the capital of Aragon, which has more than 13 million square metres devoted entirely to logistics, the biggest in Europe of its kind, with intermodal rail, road and air links, a dry port for several ports of the Iberian Peninsula and which has the largest freight railway platform in Spain. It is a national and international reference node, which has served as an engine for the development of logistics, not only in infrastructure but also in services and research, recognised and appreciated throughout the world.

Furthermore, Aragon is geographically located in the corridor that connects not only the capitals of the Southwest Europe, Lisbon, Madrid and Paris, but its location and connections allows for the continuation of communications to the main cities of the Iberian Peninsula and France, such as Seville, Valencia, Barcelona, Bilbao, Toulouse or Bordeaux. It is the interconnection point of the ports of the Iberian Peninsula between themselves and with Madrid, serving as a hinge for all communications in south-western Europe, of the utmost importance if we consider that several of the ports of the Iberian Peninsula are major inlet and outlet points for global goods.

Determination of demand

One factor that is always considered in determining the size and equipment of the network is the traffic demand. Undoubtedly it is a factor that influences the implementation of big corridors. But it is difficult to determine the future demand in any great detail. We wonder what system the European Commission will adopt for this and how the flows can be calculated in areas where there are currently none because there is no infrastructure to base them on. There is no demand if there is no adequate infrastructure, which means we risk falling into a dangerous and discouraging vicious circle that is difficult to resolve.

The need for detours. Passengers and freight traffic.

According to the document of the European Commission, when a particular detour seriously affects the efficiency or cohesion of traffic at a specific axis, a gap is considered to exist in the connections. In other words, the detours are necessary to meet some needs specified in this document, but they should not serve to justify failure to complete required sections.

This issue concerns us because there is an area in Europe where there have often been detours and this has resulted in a clear lack of efficiency for the current transport system, the increase in road transport with the subsequent cost to the environment, leading to one of the major bottlenecks for transport in Europe. We are referring to the Pyrenees.

We need environmentally solutions for attracting trans-Pyrenean traffics, which can not be found with the current infrastructure alone. There are affordable and environmentally friendly technical solutions that respond the unacceptable situation of Pyrenees, which suffer a current amount of road traffics which seriously affects this sensitive environment.

In any case, if the TEN-T aims to be an efficient planning tool, it must incorporate coordinated and effective territorial planning for all modes. This

means that, for example, it is necessary to identify clearly the different needs of passengers and goods, and integrate them into the corridors in the best possible way, as well as identifying the main current weaknesses that need to be addressed urgently.

If we apply this criterion of alternative routes to rail transport, corridors could fork into parallel branches depending on geographical conditions, traffic demand, technical parameters and operational issues, or if this fork could be used to serve regions with different spatial or economic structures and different affinities for passengers or goods.

This criterion would allow for traffics with very different characteristics to be separated, such as high-speed passenger and heavy goods traffic, resulting in a greater operational capacity. Although a complete and exclusive network for freight is not realistic, some sections do have a genuine need to be specialised in this way.

In some cases there is a danger of choking the continuity of the network due to potential overlaps with other axes. This is the current situation of the Pyrenees, where the existing roads are saturated at the coastlines and high-speed rail links are being launched. If we use this infrastructure as a priority for passenger traffic as well as for goods traffic, we run the risk of saturating the network, and the traffic flows before and after this critical point. Therefore, in order to separate the flows of passenger and goods traffic in this area, which is very specific and has almost unique characteristics within the EU (which as well as in the Pyrenees, only exist in the Alps) we need "ad hoc" solutions. This is a sensitive area which is suffering from the impact of current traffic, so a new infrastructure is needed to channel goods traffic, so as not to damage the landscape or the environment, but which solves the serious pollution problems that currently exist.

Geographical aspects for determining the network

In the work paper of the group of experts nº1, regarding the geographical aspects for the review of the TEN-T, some reflections have been made, that we have found very interesting and therefore should be more relevant in the final documents drafted by the European Commission, as they reflect the main directions pursued by the Commission in this review:

- The analysis made by this group on the imbalance between the ports of Northern Europe and those of the Mediterranean is interesting. If we want Mediterranean ports to gain importance face to those of the North Sea because of the traffic from Asia, avoiding unnecessary journeys, optimising flows from Asia and also reducing the polluting emissions, it is essential to make these ports fully effective due to good hinterland connections, especially by rail. This is even interesting for environmental issues, since strengthening Mediterranean ports will reduce the current transport times and the use of more polluting modes such as road transport.

- We would also like to note that, as stated by the expert group of the European Commission, the flexibility of the system need not come from the concentration of infrastructure, rather the opposite in fact. It is also particularly important to ensure the competitiveness and continuity in case of any breakdown or disruption of the system, with effective alternatives. It is therefore necessary to establish routes and networks to enable distribution "right and left," optimising the main network and providing options if necessary. It is not necessarily important to stay near the hinterland, but to allow for efficient distribution before and after this hinterland.

- It is important that the European criteria has some relevance over the national criteria. The top-down approach for the network design seems interesting, precisely because it favours supranational interests, provided that is necessary to also include the agents who are most directly connected with the territory to create a comprehensive overview.

- Once again, the work group highlights the need for a comprehensive network, covering passenger and freight needs, and long distances.

Impact assessment

The document also indicates that this methodology will be accompanied by an impact assessment process, including effects that are not economically quantifiable, such as cohesion. This approach is ideal, provided that this criterion is an integral part of the TEN-T planning and therefore duly assessed. However, we still need to increase the definition of the methodology to follow for this assessment, the criteria and its consideration, which is why we would appreciate more information from the Commission and work groups.

Consistency with other European policy objectives

The consideration in the definition of networks, transport policies, energy, climate, environment and innovation of the "Europe 2020" strategy applies for the same demand. They are principles that we share and which should be reflected in this strategy, but the document of the European Commission does not fully clarify how these concepts will be integrated. In our opinion, they should be transversal elements that contribute to the main objectives to be met by the TEN-T. In this regard, the TEN-T planning can help to coordinate the criteria and contributions, but the first step is to define which criteria should be taken into account and to what extent.

Additional infrastructure measures

With regards to additional infrastructure measures, of course they are important and necessary to ensure the future smooth running of the network, allowing for analysis and action that involves all modes of transport, optimising each of them in the most appropriate way.

Intelligent Transport Systems play an important role in this regard; make the mobility of people and goods safer, more sustainable and more efficient using the different modes of transport.

The incompatibility of systems between the States creates difficulties for users, the existence of a highly fragmented market also leads to higher prices for consumers; this is why it is important to create a single standardised system in all Member States.

But it is not possible to forget their “complementary” nature, i.e. to help competitiveness but which needs to be based on a number of effective infrastructures, which still need working on. They should not serve as a "distraction" but as an incentive to optimise a network to be completed first.

In this regard, we emphasize the importance of working on the main bottlenecks that still exist in Europe, and that occur in border areas and major geographical obstacles, such as the Pyrenees. It is undeniable that the connections between the Iberian Peninsula and the rest of Europe are still far from efficient and do not meet the requirements for interoperability that is necessary within the heart of the EU. That’s why we insist that it is still necessary to improve the infrastructure that serves as a basis for all other transport systems, and therefore we still need to adopt a system like the trans-European networks, on a European scale.

A European scale that also takes into account the global context, the entry and exit flow points, the main traffics and their impacts on the economy, transport and the environment in Europe.

IV. THE TEN-T IMPLEMENTATION

In this section, the document refers to the assignation of priorities in the projects, and mentions European added value throughout the text, which should steer the selection. To identify these projects we believe that, as the European Commission also indicates, cross-border sections and bottlenecks are conflictive points on a European scale, which, if resolved, would affect the whole of the EU, and therefore contain this added value.

If this added value also determined the financing to be received from European funds, we emphasize the particular sensitivity of the subject that requires giving more importance to supranational criteria as mentioned above.

We find interesting the option of taking into account the revenue resulting from transport activities and we believe this to be necessary in the future, but always considering the need to use this funding in infrastructure that meet the criteria of sustainability, environment and safety targeted by the European Commission.

The idea of a common fund for sustainable transport has started to appear in European documentation and is a concept that we believe would be interesting to develop.

The concentration and coordination of funds for transport in a single framework is a required initiative and will facilitate the management of different activities. But this standardisation must not affect the receipt of funds for other projects, which are not –as indeed they won't be- included in a core network, because they are considered more local or regional projects, but will undoubtedly also contribute to overcoming bottlenecks and aiding European cohesion.

These projects should also continue to be covered in the budgets of the EU, because they contribute to the construction of Europe, so it is necessary to ensure equal opportunities for all of them, bearing in mind that in many cases they can only be carried out with the support and help from the EU.

A single funding framework can help better distribution, but in the absence of sufficient funds to complete the whole network, the work of the affected Member States remains essential to ensure the implementation of the plans.

Perhaps a more specific weight of the Executive Agency of the TEN-T, not only regarding the coordination and allocation of funds but in the evaluation of results (and even the imposition of penalties), and the pursuit of private funding could help better management and project implementation.

Private sector participation should be facilitated by an appropriate regulatory framework. In addition, the EIB's role is and remains essential, for example, providing tools to mitigate the risks for the public and private sector. Their participation in the selection and evaluation of projects may actually help speed up their implementation. But in this case, the EIB's criteria, which is basically economic profitability, should be expanded to follow the philosophy of the entire document of the Commission and include non-quantifiable values such as cohesion or European added value.

V. LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF THE TEN-T POLICY REVIEW.

The whole spirit of the document of the European Commission shows the importance of highlighting European criteria over national criteria, and that is why a top-down approach responds much better to the objectives pursued. However, there is a danger of not incorporating many of the institutional and private agents who are the ones who best know the needs of the territory and therefore can really help to define the criteria throughout the whole physical space of Europe.

It is important to consult society to achieve optimal territorial planning. The possibility of creating new structures of governance, which integrate the whole network, could be useful for implementation of TEN-T, but together with local players and agents that give a particularly European value such as cross-border operators.

In any case, what is repeatedly stated is a clear lack of coordination between the States, therefore using a legal instrument such as a common regulation for the guidance and allocation of financial support could help definitely to improve the cooperation between Member States.

ANNEX: CURRENT TEN-T AXIS Nº 16 AS A CORRIDOR THAT INTEGRATES THE CRITERIA SPECIFIED IN THE COMMISSION DOCUMENT

The Government of Aragon is particularly involved in the implementation of one of the current European priority projects, the axis nº 16 Sines / Algeciras - Madrid - Paris. We believe it is a corridor that perfectly incorporates the main criteria sought by the European Commission in this review, due both to its location and to its capacity to respond to the current needs of sustainable transport and its European added value. In our opinion, these are the factors that make this infrastructure necessary:

- Geographical or spatial factors: accessibility and ease access to markets are key elements for social, economic and territorial cohesion. Standardising the accessibility criteria, including the passage of natural and administrative barriers, helps to reduce economic and social disparities. The axis nº 16 allows the central areas of the Southwest to have effective links to ports, thus providing an outlet for its traffic. But it also interconnects nodes with the most strategic and economic importance in south-western Europe, cities and ports, making the connection economically profitable.

- External and global flows: the expert group nº 1 for the review of the networks mentioned that " Improving infrastructure and services in Mediterranean ports, including their hinterland connections, could lead to a long term shift from the North Sea to the Mediterranean ports of a part of the freight flows from/to Asia, depending also on capacity constraints of hinterland infrastructure in North-Western Europe and likely increases in fuel prices.." Axis nº 16 connects several of the most important Mediterranean ports and channels freight towards the north and east of Europe as well as improving the connection with the north of Africa.

- Responding to the needs of passengers and freight. The long distance and border areas volumes are relevant to the selection of elements of the future

core network. The traffic in the Pyrenees, its modal distribution and the importance of freight justify the need of axis nº 16, especially if environmental criteria are taken into account.

- Interconnectivity and multimodality. The connection between different routes and between individual links is important. The axis 16 allows for different connections, since it links up with all the major logistic points of southwest Europe. The axis 16 responds well to the identification of the basic network by nodes, as it connects capitals of Member States as well as logistic centres in these States.

- Elimination of bottlenecks. This is important for the EU, especially if they affect the long distance or international traffic. The construction of new links fully justified by existing congestion is still important, as is the case. We still need efficient connections in the Pyrenees, which is resolved with the implementation of axis 16.

- Based on an existing infrastructure. The European Commission document stated that it was important to ensure the continuity of ongoing projects and remove major bottlenecks. 75% of axis 16, which will connect the networks in Spain, France and Portugal, has already been constructed. The missing section, the Central Crossing of the Pyrenees, would give a definitive solution to the Pyrenees problems, and would also symbolise the opening of the connections between the Iberian Peninsula and France by strengthening a sustainable mode of transport such as rail.

- Long-term strategy with step-by-step implementations. With regards to axis 16, with a view to achieving efficient freight rail transport in Europe, it is good to work mainly on the main part of the corridor that already exists, creating the conditions for improving a culture of using rail, and at the same time preparing the work for starting the remaining sections.

- European added value, to which the Commission gives great importance. A large itinerary of axis 16 has already been constructed, but one of the main sections that must be completed, although it is an important infrastructure, will have an exponential impact for both the promotion of intermodality and cross-border connections.

- Economic competitiveness and the environment come together in projects like nº 16.