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Finance ministers hold back aviation and shipping talks

The way to reducing the climate impact of aviation and shipping could be by spending some of the revenue from charges on helping developing countries play their part, but finance ministers are still reluctant to accept specified uses for money coming into their coffers.

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Ulla Rasmussen on Barroso's Political Guidelines for the Next Commission

'It is impossible to express more clearly that transport should be subordinate to our climate objectives, rather than the other way round, as the Commission's transport department has always tried to maintain.'

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The latest figures on how car makers are reducing carbon dioxide emissions from new cars highlight rapidly differing performances among the main manufacturers. But the pattern of those differences shows that the forthcoming obligatory CO₂ limits are leading to changes in the automotive industry, which has led T&E to intensify its call for the EU to introduce CO₂ limits for light commercial vehicles.



VW's 2009 Golf BlueMotion is 27% more efficient than the equivalent model from 2007; T&E's report argues that technology used for diesel cars can also be applied to vans.

Car makers' performance makes case for van limits

The best reducers based on sales in Europe were BMW and Mazda. The German luxury car maker recorded the biggest improvement for the second year running, cutting its average CO₂ emissions from new models by 10%. The Japanese maker Mazda cut its emissions by 8.2%, but it was one of the worst offenders before so had plenty of room for improvement.

Nine of the 14 biggest car makers reduced their emissions by 4% or less. Most noticeable was the dramatic slowing of reduction efforts at Fiat and Peugeot-Citroën, the two companies who came top when T&E first published figures for each maker in 2006, and who are close to achieving the limit of 130 g/km set out in the EU's first legislation that imposes obligatory limits.

T&E director Jos Dings said, 'Despite having been watered down to unnecessary levels, the new EU law is already having an impact. If the overall drop in average CO₂ emissions was purely related to the financial crisis, fuel prices or changing consumer behaviour, we would see every company reducing much more equally.'

'In fact what is happening is that car makers are seeing how far they have to cut, and changing their fleets accordingly. If legally binding targets work for cars, they will work for vans where progress

so far has been even worse. Fuel-efficient vans will be good for the environment and save billions in fuel costs for the many businesses that depend on them.'

Vans now represent 13% of total 'light vehicle' (car and van) sales in the EU, but the share is increasing rapidly.

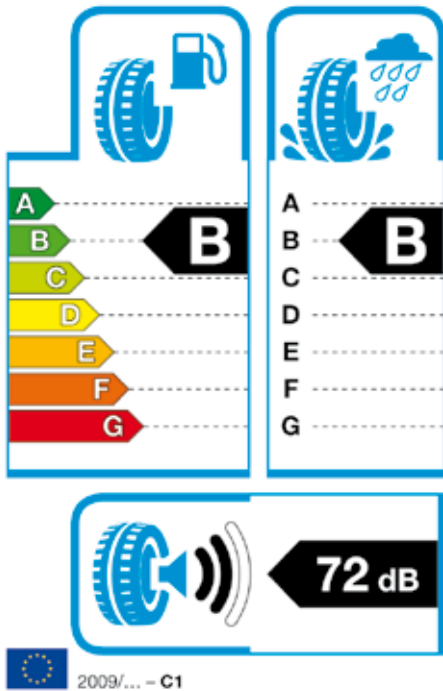
Until three years ago, no figures were available maker-by-maker, and the industry wanted to be treated as a single entity. But then T&E broke the secrecy by listing emissions reductions per manufacturer, which effectively stopped the worst emitters hiding behind the achievements of the best reducers.

→ T&E's latest car company CO₂ report, which is available on the T&E website, also analyses some of the underlying reasons behind average emissions reductions. These include Ford's decision to sell off its gas-guzzling Jaguar and Land Rover brands (a move that accounted for half Ford's CO₂ reductions) and how some makers are failing to maximise the credit for emissions reductions by making the relevant technology optional rather than standard.



Concerns on effectiveness of tyre label scheme

MEPs, the Commission and officials of member states have agreed a labelling scheme for new tyres that T&E says is a step forward but much will now depend on national authorities being strict on implementing the scheme.



With energy labels having boosted European sales of energy-efficient fridges, freezers and washing machines, NGOs were pushing for stickers giving information on a tyre's fuel consumption, road grip in wet weather and noise to be made obligatory on all tyres. But under the compromise agreed earlier this month, supplying a label will be obligatory but manufacturers will have the option either to stick them to the tyres or provide a paper version instead.

The second option states that labels can be 'shown to the end user in the immediate proximity of the tyre', which may undermine the measure according to campaigners. That is stricter than it might have been – one

draft said the information only had to 'accompany' the tyre, but after T&E made the point that this would be unenforceable, the final legislation was amended so the label has to be 'printed' and 'in the immediate proximity' of the tyre.

Much will now depend on what happens in tyre shops and garages and how much national governments insist on the labels being accessible. Experience with the obligation on car dealers to display fuel efficiency information suggests the information is often placed in hard-to-find areas, or in places where some customers never go.

'There is so much for everyone to gain from good tyre information,' said T&E policy officer Nina

Renshaw, 'but people must have access to the information. They can save money, improve their safety, reduce noise and help the environment, but only if they know how. That's why the idea of attaching the label to the tyre itself is so important.'

A sign of how tyre labelling could encourage cleaner technology has been given by the French tyre maker Michelin saying it will put the labels on its tyres, even if it does not have to. Michelin says it has developed a range of low-energy tyres, and if customers do not see the label, such tyres will be harder to sell.

'A labelling scheme only works when the worst as well as the best products can be compared' added Renshaw, 'much will now depend on how wholesalers and retailers respond to the legislation.'

The Commission has also agreed to launch a website including a 'fuel savings calculator' by 2012. But it is also unclear how widely this will be publicised.

Finance ministers hold back progress on aviation and shipping climate talks

The idea that December's Copenhagen climate change summit should set specific greenhouse gas reduction targets for aviation and shipping has made only modest progress at the latest round of UN preparatory talks held in Bangkok earlier this month.

With the two global bodies – Icao for aviation and IMO for shipping – having failed to take any action on climate change since being asked to do so by the Kyoto climate summit 12 years ago, pressure is coming from a number of countries and from NGOs for Copenhagen to set reduction targets for both sectors and finally start cutting aviation's and shipping's contribution to global warming.

The EU had been expected to announce its target proposal at Bangkok to allow for adequate discussion before Copenhagen, but the Bangkok meeting ended with EU governments still unable to agree on the numbers.

T&E policy officer Bill Hemmings, who was in Bangkok, said, 'Rather than the hoped-for momentum to push for early global action, the meeting got bogged down on issues relating to the need to recognise shared responsibility for emissions across the globe, while at the same time reflecting the different obligations – particularly resting on developed countries – to bear most of the burden of addressing climate change.'

'As the meeting ended, there were signs that the revenues from measures to reduce aviation and shipping emissions – which could be substantial – might be enough to motivate governments to take action. The problem is that financing measures to tackle climate change is a critical issue for developing countries, yet EU finance ministries, who ultimately have to decide any EU position on the use of revenues, don't seem convinced or cannot shake off their traditional reluctance to accept that money coming in could be earmarked for a specific purpose.'

Last month the International Air Transport Association (Iata) proposed that the aviation industry would cut its carbon emissions by 50% between 2005 and 2050. T&E responded by showing how the proposal was effectively 'meaningless', as it was only aspirational and lacked any commitment on measures to achieve these cuts.

Icao and Iata seem to be pushing for a commitment to achieve a fuel efficiency improvement across the world's commercial airline fleet of 1.5% per year up to 2020, then relying on biofuels and technological advances to achieve further reductions.

Hemmings added, 'The 1.5% fuel efficiency improvement is probably less than what the industry is achieving already, and it would be impossible to enforce as it's a fleet average measurement.'

'As regards long-term emission reductions, both Icao and Iata remain uncommitted on the question of global market measures – notably emissions trading. And in any case their positions seem to be based on the premise that aviation emissions could continue to grow indefinitely, and that, at some point, aviation might agree to pay its external costs by paying for emission reductions in developing countries.'

Swiss road lobby says no to Gigaliners

A Swiss haulage association has said allowing 25-metre lorries – known as ‘mega-trucks’ or ‘gigaliners’ – on Europe’s roads would be bad economically and environmentally.

Astag, a committed member of the vocal haulage lobby group IRU (International Road Transport Union), says the controversial lorries would make no sense for economic reasons in domestic transport, and that they would also be an unnecessary burden for road infrastructure and the environment.

By contrast, the Swedish government is promoting the ‘mega-trucks’.

At a recent conference on intelligent transport systems attended by several EU transport ministers, the Swedish lorry maker Scania arranged for several ministers to test drive the company’s 25-metre trucks.

Afterwards, Sweden’s communications minister Åsa Torstensson said, ‘I believe transports with longer vehicles are the right way to go.’

White paper targets missed

The EU has been accused of missing targets put forward in the 2001 Common Transport Policy. A study from the University of Leeds says the 2001 white paper promised sustainable mobility, but progress made in greening transport over the past 10 years have been limited. The study, which was carried out for the Community of European Railways says limited progress has also been made in revitalising the rail sector, with achievements largely restricted to intramodel competition.



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OPINION



By Ulla Rasmussen,
T&E President

Barroso’s decarbonisation aspiration should be welcomed; but now let’s see the detail

After a long summer of uncertainty, José Manuel Barroso has been reappointed in his post of Commission president for another five years. And in his one statement on transport, he has hit the nail right on the head.

As the Commission has the unique right to propose new laws, an important role of the president is to be one of the first to highlight future challenges and create support for their solutions. His attempt for the next five years is the 40-page document ‘Political Guidelines for the Next Commission’.

The right response is to develop the smart, low-carbon solutions that cut emissions, bring skilled jobs, cost governments nothing, and on the contrary stem the steady outflow of resources for oil imports.

These guidelines are designed to keep many people happy, but nevertheless there are some striking passages. One of them is the only passage where transport is mentioned: ‘The next Commission needs to maintain the momentum towards a low-emission economy, and in particular towards decarbonising our electricity supply and the transport sector.’

It is impossible to express more clearly that transport should be subordinate to our climate objectives, rather than the other way round, as

the Commission’s transport department has always tried to maintain. And Barroso is right. Europe needs to cut emissions, start to close the immense budget deficits, and create new jobs now unemployment is running at post-war record levels.

The wrong response is to start building more infrastructure. This just increases emissions, saves old construction jobs rather than creates new high-skilled ones, and increases deficits. The money will not be there anyway, and transport volumes have gone down so that new capacity is needed less than ever.

The right response is therefore, more than ever, to develop the smart, low-carbon solutions that cut emissions, bring skilled jobs, cost governments nothing, and on the contrary stem the steady outflow of resources for oil imports. It is to focus on road pricing and fuel taxation. This can reduce the need to increase labour taxes and hence protect the environment and jobs at the same time.

Climate should be at the heart of transport policy. Strong interim targets for transport energy demand and decarbonisation should

be set, spending, pricing, speed policy, and technology deployment should all be guided by climate objectives.

Barroso’s guidelines are the overture to the opera, but they are not the opera itself. They set out the challenge – the need to strive for a low-emission economy, in particular decarbonising electricity and transport. But there are several more acts before the end of the performance. For these to happen, we need action that will result from hard and imaginative decisions that have to be taken, regardless of the power of traditional industrial interests.

We therefore applaud the aspiration he sets out in his guidelines for the next five years. But recent events suggest some scepticism is in order. In May Barroso gave the impression he was aware of the need to make transport a priority in tackling climate change. A month later the Commission’s paper on updating the Common Transport Policy barely mentioned climate change. We now eagerly await the substance that will make Barroso’s aspiration a reality, substance that has been sadly absent so far.

EU members failing their citizens over air quality

Barely half the EU's member states will meet the pollution reduction targets set for 2010 in the EU's national emissions ceilings directive.

The European Environment Agency's latest report shows just 14 of the 27 member states will achieve targets to reduce sulphur dioxide, ni-

trogen oxides, non-methane volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and ammonia to required levels. Spain will hit the target for only one of the four, while France, Germany and the Netherlands will meet only two. The news is better than feared at the end of 2008, when only 11 countries were on track to hit their targets.

As the figures are based on 2007 data, it is possible the global economic recession will have led to decreases in pollutants that will help some countries meet more targets. However, adjustments made specifically for Spain show that the ceilings would still be missed.

T&E policy officer Kerstin Meyer said, 'No-one should be surprised that so many of these targets are being missed because the member states' approach to them has been so poor.

'Pollution readings from vehicle test cycles were known to be unreliable eight years ago, yet governments still pinned their hopes on them. And in many cases governments simply didn't work out how much a given measure would contribute to reducing pollution, opting instead for measures of least resistance which made the best headlines.'



Guide to best vehicles

The Commission is to set up an on-line guide showing information on clean and energy-efficient vehicles. The announcement is one of 20 actions identified in an action plan on urban mobility published last month. This is a follow-up to the EU green paper on urban mobility which came out two years ago; the action plan should have been ready last year. Among other ideas is EU support for research into lower and zero-emission vehicles, and discussing with member states how energy-efficient practices could be included in driving tests, but there is no mention of cycling. The EU's competence on urban issues is severely limited because most decisions are taken at local level.



Road noise and blood pressure

A Swedish study says a quarter of European people live near roads where noise levels are likely to raise blood pressure to risky levels. A team from the University of Lund found that the risk of high blood pressure rose by more than 25% with noise levels above 60 decibels, putting them at risk of heart disease and stroke. The study, which was based on a sample of just under 28,000 people, is published in the Environmental Health Journal.



New laws boost innovation

An internal Commission review of EU innovation shows that new laws on car emissions, emissions trading and eco-design are boosting markets for cleaner technologies. It says Europe has improved its innovation performance and narrowed the gap with its main competitors.

The findings add weight to several T&E campaigns which all make the point that setting ambitious environmental standards at EU level will offer the best incentives to encouraging the growth of tomorrow's technologies.

Sustainable transport 'must be a priority'

The EU transport commissioner Antonio Tajani has told EU transport ministers that sustainable transport must be a priority for a post-2010 EU transport policy. Speaking in Stockholm last month, he said the transport sector must reduce its dependence on oil.

While few will disagree with this aim, it is hardly consistent with the Commission's vision for the future of European transport published in June, which mentioned climate change only in passing, made no attempt to address how traffic demand could be reduced, and barely mentioned traffic congestion.

New lending criteria needed

The NGO network CEE Bankwatch says the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development urgently needs to reduce its carbon-heavy investments in new motorways and air travel, and instead promote transport that assists the transition to a low-carbon economy. Its comments come in a consultation by the Bank on how it decides its transport lending in central and eastern Europe. Bankwatch also says the Bank's 'private sector at just about all costs' approach is leading to bad lending decisions, and it should ensure that railway restructuring does not become a misleading term that takes trade off the rails because of higher costs.

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