

## **T&E comment** **on Transport Council's environment integration strategy**

### **Introduction**

Of all the various strategies produced to integrate environmental concerns into the EU's everyday policy, the Transport Council's integration strategy is the best to date. If implemented, it would go a long way towards meeting transport's responsibility in the European Community's goal of sustainable development.

The strategy assesses the problems and accepts the need for change in the transport sector; recognising as it does that, "an indefinite continuation of current trends in the growth of private and commercial road transport and aviation is unsustainable ..." (paragraph 6).

It also accepts the need for a fundamental change in people's behaviour; and even of reducing the need to travel, as well as stressing the importance of measures such as getting the prices right and good land-use planning.

The strategy commits the Council to further action. It commendably does not see its strategy as the end of the process, but rather the beginning<sup>1</sup>. It even contains a good set of detailed indicators to measure progress<sup>2</sup> towards sustainable transport.

### **Main weakness**

There is, however, one crucial problem with the transport strategy as it presently stands.

**The Transport Council's strategy contains no targets.** For the strategy to work, it needs to have teeth; and these need to be in the form of binding targets. Although the strategy contains admirable recognition of transport's environmental problems, and goes further in its statement of principles than ever before, the lack of targets gives no impetus to take action.

This structural flaw needs to be rectified as soon as possible and this will require a significant degree of political will by EU governments.

It is easy to set long-term goals, which are essentially broad statements of principle – everybody can agree that we want peace and sustainable development. It is far more difficult to set medium-term targets, which require concrete targets for real action; and the Transport integration strategy has so far failed to take this all-important step. These targets would be specific medium-term goals, stepping stones along the way to a new framework for sustainability.

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<sup>1</sup> The first review to the strategy is due by June 2001

<sup>2</sup> The advanced set of 31 sustainability indicators in the European Environment Agency's TERM (transport and environment reporting mechanism).

It is of course more difficult to get political agreement on targets which require immediate action but whose results will not be immediately visible; which is why the Council has not yet done so. Yet the integration strategy needs real targets: the alternative is failure and continued unsustainable transport.

For example: the strategy stresses reduction of **CO<sub>2</sub> emissions** from transport as a priority, recognising the urgency of the situation and stressing the need to comply with the Kyoto Protocol reduction target by 2008-2012. Yet the strategy stops short of proposing real actions with real targets. It proposes the following action on CO<sub>2</sub> from transport:

- “Study the need for a strategy for the introduction of renewable energies within the transport sector” [20 (l)]
- “Continue to implement the conclusions of the joint Council [Transport and Environment] ... and to evaluate the implementation of the conclusions and their relation to objectives, in particular those in the Kyoto Protocol, by the end of the year 2001” [22 (a)]
- “Achieve further progress, especially in the years 2000 and 2001 ... by examining the Commission Communication of 1998 on transport and CO<sub>2</sub>.” [22 (b)]

In other words, there are no targets for concrete action, even in an area which the strategy flags as especially important<sup>3</sup>. It is therefore clear that the transport sector will not be forced to take responsibility for its contribution to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions under the present strategy. It is therefore unlikely that transport will contribute to achieving our Kyoto commitments – but will instead increase the amount of work needed in other sectors.

A series of ambitious and comprehensive targets for transport is therefore needed at the earliest opportunity.

### **Other criticisms**

Other criticisms of the strategy are also valid. For example, the strategy over-estimates the usefulness of both technical measures and self-regulation by industry. While such solutions certainly have their place, and technological breakthroughs can act as a catalyst to greater change, they have not, in themselves, been good tools for achieving meaningful environmental improvements.

To illustrate, look at the **voluntary agreement** which was signed in 1998 between the EU and ACEA, the European auto-manufacturers' association. ACEA agreed to produce cars by 2008 which emit on average no more than 140g CO<sub>2</sub>/km – or about 5 litres of petrol per 100km. Even if the industry is able to meet its commitment (and this is far from certain<sup>4</sup>), the effect will only

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<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting that, while the Kyoto targets are important, the emphasis placed on this one need deflects attention away from other transport problems which are equally important. These include, for example, air and noise pollution, accidents and of course the social and economic problems which our present unsustainable transport system cause.

<sup>4</sup> A T&E report, “The drive for less fuel,” written in 2000 by renowned transport economist, Per Kågeson, shows that ACEA will be unable to meet its commitment without significant government intervention.

be to take a bite out of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions growth. By 2010, thanks to a net growth in fuel consumption caused by increased demand, road transport's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions will be just under 25% higher than in 1990 – making it even harder for the EU to meet its commitment to 8% overall emissions reduction<sup>5</sup>. This is clearly unsustainable, as the Council strategy itself acknowledges.

Another possible criticism is the **slow pace**: not much is happening. For example, the Council invited the Commission to “continue to work on transport pricing in order to elaborate proposals for the next steps by the middle of year 2000” [20 (d)]. So far we have seen no proposals for transport pricing coming from the Commission; and the issue is not even on the Commission's 2001 work-programme.

### **Conclusion**

The biggest challenge to successful implementation of the strategy is developing political will. Until this question is solved, we will know with increasing clarity what transport's problems are, but will be unable to take effective action to solve them.

It is not possible to change the transport system from one day to the next, but it is absolutely possible, and necessary, to develop a new framework over time through a gradual and continuous series of steps forward to sustainability.

This is the role which the transport integration strategy can play. The framework set out so far in the strategy is very encouraging. And once transport ministers flesh it out with real targets, it will set a clear example across the EU.

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### **Links**

T&E website: <http://www.t-e.nu>

T&E Memorandum to the Swedish Presidency:  
<http://www.t-e.nu/Publications/2000%20pubs/T&E00-5.pdf>

Transport, infrastructure and the economy: Why new roads can harm the economy, local employment, and offer bad value to European taxpayers: <http://www.t-e.nu/Publications/2000%20pubs/T&E%2000-6.pdf>

Response to the Commission Report on the Common Transport Policy – Perspectives for the Future:  
<http://www.t-e.nu/Publications/1999%20pubs/T&E%2099-5.pdf>

The drive for less fuel: <http://www.t-e.nu/Publications/2000%20pubs/T&E00-1.pdf>

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<sup>5</sup> The figures are taken from the Auto-Oil II Base Case, which was developed in 1998 with the approval of all stakeholders, including the auto- and oil industries, and assumes all cars on average comply with the ACEA voluntary agreement – not just those manufactured by ACEA.