



**Europe's voice for sustainable transport**

**Position paper on the Marco Polo programme  
on how to improve the environmental  
performance of the freight transport sector**

## **T&E welcomes the *objectives* of Marco Polo programme**

T&E, the European Federation for Transport and Environment welcomes the Commission's proposal on the granting of Community financial assistance to improve the environmental performance of the freight transport system. This proposal, known as the Marco Polo programme, is intended to reduce road congestion and improve the environmental performance of the transport system by shifting freight transport from road to short sea shipping, rail and inland waterway transport.

The Marco Polo programme, replacing the PACT programme (Pilot Action for Combined Transport), is planned for the period 2003 to 2007 and amounts to 115 million Euros. Its scope is broader than the PACT programme. It includes modal shift actions, which should deliver impacts within three years, catalyst actions which should be viable after four years and common learning actions which lead to the improvement of commercial services in the market. The supported actions must have a minimum size of 500'000 Euros for common learning actions, 1 Mio Euros for modal shift actions and 3 Mio Euros for catalyst actions.

With regard to the development in freight transport over the last 30 years, concerted actions are needed to reverse the trend, i.e. towards more road transport, and to reduce the negative impacts of freight transport. There is a general consensus that intermodal transport must play an important role as part of a sustainable European transport system and that investments must be concentrated on transport modes with fewer impacts on the environment. This consensus culminated in the strategy of the European Transport Ministers to integrate the environment into the transport sector, agreed in 1999.<sup>1</sup> The European Conference of Ministers of Transport ECMT underlined the importance of intermodal transport at their last meeting in Bucharest in May 2002.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the expressed political support for intermodal transport and modal shift, the Council of Transport Ministers under the Spanish presidency in June 2002 could not agree on the Marco Polo programme. The main dispute was on the budget for the programme. Most transport ministers wanted to reduce the budget proposed by the Commission. This, of course, stands in stark contradiction to the previously agreed objective to promote combined transport and modal shift in order to reduce congestion and the environmental impacts of transport.

**T&E supports the *objectives* of the Marco Polo programme but considers the proposed budget of 115 Mio Euros as a an absolute minimum level to obtain any results.** Any attempt to cut this budget down indicates a lack of commitment to moving the current transport system towards sustainability.

---

<sup>1</sup> Council Strategy on the integration of environment and sustainable development into the transport policy submitted by the "Transport" Council to the European Council of Helsinki, Luxemburg, 6 October 1999

<sup>2</sup> Modal Shift – Consolidated Resolution on Combined Transport, CEMT/CM(2002)3/FINAL, 04 June 2002

## **T&E doubts the *effectiveness* of Marco Polo**

T&E supports the objective of the Marco Polo programme as it will move freight transport in the right direction and urges its adoption. However, it doubts the ability of the programme to achieve its objectives, i.e. to reduce congestion and the environmental impacts of transport. The Marco Polo programme is a necessary but insufficient tool to reverse a 30-year-old trend in European freight transport by itself. It does not change the underlying structure and its budget is too small.

- Financial aid is too small to achieve modal shift

The proposed 115 Mio Euros for the Marco Polo programme cannot change freight transport fundamentally and shift a considerable quantity of goods from the road to other transport modes. Therefore, it is unlikely to achieve a major impact on reducing congestion or improving the environment. Compared to the huge distortions and unbalanced investments in favour of road transport over the last years, the Marco Polo programme budget is tiny. It has to cover six years, be shared among all EU member states and be spent for all types of intermodal projects: from promoting combined road-rail transport to pushing even such dubious new concepts as motorways of the sea.

- Financial aid for intermodal transport is only one instrument to achieve modal shift

Competition between transport modes is heavily distorted. The framework needs to be changed and the playing field levelled. The Marco Polo programme can only be effective if other instruments accompany it. International rail freight services must be improved. Therefore, the opening of the rail network must be accelerated. Furthermore, price distortions between transport modes must be abolished and fair and efficient pricing for transport infrastructure use established in EU Member States.

- Modal shift is not sufficient to reduce the environmental impacts of transport

Much more must be done than modal shift to reduce the environmental impact of freight transport. The permanent growth in freight transport must be broken and the growth rate of transport decoupled from economic growth as European leaders recognised in Gothenburg in 2001<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, it is important to implement fair and efficient pricing instruments. Furthermore, logistics should be developed to increase efficiency of the transport system. The Marco Polo programme should also support activities that aim to reduce or prevent the need for transport.

---

<sup>3</sup> A Sustainable Europe for a better World – A European Union strategy for Sustainable Development; Presidency Conclusions – Göteborg, 15 and 16 June 2001

- Congestion is only partly a freight transport problem

It is an illusion that any measure taken only in freight transport can reduce congestion. Congestion is mainly a problem of private cars, which are far more numerous than trucks. Even though trucks take up more space per vehicle, and have very heavy impacts on the environment, they seldom cause congestion. Without an appropriate pricing system for private cars and transport demand measures for them, congestion will not disappear.

- Change in freight transport requires changes in other policy areas

Freight transport is not isolated from the economy and society and thus cannot be changed by transport policy alone. A sustainable European land use planning policy is needed that change production, distribution and consumption patterns, in order to reduce and prevent transport.

### **T&E's recommendation**

**T&E recommends to the European Parliament and the Council to approve the Marco Polo programme.**

**T&E considers the proposed 115 Mio Euros for the Marco Polo programme the lowest possible amount and encourages the European Parliament and the Council to increase the budget.**

**T&E urges the European Parliament and the Council to add activities which aim to reduce the need for freight transport and prevent transport to the Marco Polo project.**

**T&E urges the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council to take the necessary measures to level the playing field between transport modes.**

**T&E urges the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council to move ahead with the implementation of a fair and efficient pricing system for all transport modes, for both passenger and freight transport.**

**T&E urges the European Commission to present a proposal for a sustainable European land use policy.**

For more information, please contact Markus Liechti at T&E:

e-mail: [markus.liechti@t-e.nu](mailto:markus.liechti@t-e.nu)

phone: + 32 2 502 99 09

website: [www.t-e.nu](http://www.t-e.nu)