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Report

drawn up on behalf of the Committee on Regional Policy, Regional Planning and
Transport

on the proposal from the Commission of the European Communities to the
Council (Doc. 39/77) for a decision subscribing, on behalf of the Community, to
a joint declaration of intent to implement a European project in the field of
transport on the subject: 'Electronic traffic aids on major roads'
(COST Project 30)

Rapporteur: Mr K. NYBORG

By letter of 1 April 1977 the President of the Council of the European Communities requested the European Parliament, pursuant to Article 75 of the EEC Treaty, to deliver an opinion on the proposal from the Commission of the European Communities to the Council for a Decision subscribing, on behalf of the Community, to a joint declaration of intent to implement a European project in the field of transport on the subject: 'Electronic traffic aids on major roads' (COST Project 30).

The President of the European Parliament referred this proposal to the Committee on Regional Policy, Regional Planning and Transport as the committee responsible and to the Committee on Energy and Research for its opinion.

On 26 April 1977 the Committee on Regional Policy, Regional Planning and Transport appointed Mr Nyborg rapporteur.

It considered this proposal at its meetings of 25 May and 22 June 1977.

At the latter meeting the Committee on Regional Policy, Regional Planning and Transport unanimously adopted the motion for a resolution and explanatory statement.

The Committee decided to ask for the report to be considered in plenary sitting without debate.

Present: Mr Evans, chairman; Mr Nyborg, vice-chairman and rapporteur; Mr McDonald, vice-chairman; Mr Brugger, Mr Delmotte, Mr Edwards (deputizing for Mr Hoffmann), Mr Ellis, Mr Hamilton, Mrs Kellett-Bowman, Mr Mascagni and Mr Osborn.

The opinion of the Committee on Energy and Research is attached.

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A.

The Committee on Regional Policy, Regional Planning and Transport hereby submits to the European Parliament the following motion for a resolution together with explanatory statement:

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

embodying the opinion of the European Parliament on the proposal from the Commission of the European Communities to the Council for a Decision subscribing, on behalf of the Community, to a joint declaration of intent to implement a European project in the field of transport on the subject: 'Electronic traffic aids on major roads' (COST Project 30)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the proposal from the Commission of the European Communities to the Council¹;
 - having been consulted by the Council pursuant to Article 75 of the EEC Treaty (Doc. 39/77);
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Policy, Regional Planning and Transport and the opinion of the Committee on Energy and Research (Doc.186/77)
1. Considers that practical application of the research activities proposed may contribute to greater road safety, more rational use of the transport infrastructure and a reduction in energy consumption;
 2. Therefore gives its approval to the Commission proposal;
 3. Expresses the hope that all the European states which have acceded to the COST programme will shortly sign the joint declaration of intent;
 4. Requests the Commission of the European Communities to conduct a study immediately to determine the best method of apportioning the costs involved in applying the research results.

¹ OJ No. C 91, 15.4.1977, p.11

B.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present proposal is for the adoption of a Decision subscribing to a joint declaration of intent to implement a European project on the subject of electronic traffic aids on major roads.

2. This project forms part of the COST programme. The Committee on European Cooperation in the Field of Scientific and Technical Research (COST) was set up by the Council of the European Communities in October 1970 with a view to the implementation of a Community scientific and technological policy. At the very beginning, however, it was decided that third countries in Europe could take part in the research activities¹.

3. The COST programme covers several areas of common action, including informatics, telecommunications, meteorology and pollution. Five specific projects were originally proposed in the field of transport:

- Project 30: Electronic traffic aids on major roads
- Project 31: Study of the technology of electromagnetic levitation of guided vehicles
- Project 32: Study of the feasibility, economics and development costs of a marine hovercraft of approximately 2,000 tonnes
- Project 33: Forward study on European inter-city passenger transport requirements
- Project 34: Research and development to construct two prototype train motor coaches powered by a closed-cycle turbine.

It was ultimately decided for various reasons to proceed with projects 30 and 33 only.

4. The forward study on European inter-city passenger transport requirements, whose execution was entrusted to the OECD (Organization for European Cooperation and Development) in cooperation with the Commission and the ECMT (European Conference of Ministers of Transport), was recently brought to a satisfactory conclusion with the publication of a high-level scientific report.

¹ Nineteen European countries have joined in the COST programme. In addition to the nine Member States of the EEC, Norway, Austria, Sweden, Switzerland, Spain, Portugal, Finland, Greece, Turkey and Yugoslavia are taking part in specific projects.

The OECD report (OECD, ITP (76) 9 final of 22 February 1977), which is of inestimable value for the preparation of Mr Seefeld's own-initiative report on inter-city transport of the future, will be the subject of detailed discussion in connection with this report in the Committee on Regional Policy, Regional Planning and Transport during the coming months.

II. COMMENTS ON THE COMMISSION'S DOCUMENT

5. The proposal from the Commission of the European Communities consists of a short explanatory memorandum, a draft decision, the joint declaration of intent itself (officially styled 'Memorandum of Understanding') and two annexes, the first dealing with the coordination of the project and the second enumerating the nine topics which make up the research programme of COST Project 30.

6. The draft Council Decision has three articles. Article 1 provides for the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding by the European Economic Community. Article 2 authorizes the President of the Council to nominate the persons who will sign the agreement on behalf of the Community and confer upon them the powers necessary for committing the Community. Finally, Article 3 states that the Community shall be represented by the Commission on the Management Committee.

7. The Memorandum of Understanding is divided into five sections. Pursuant to Section 1, the signatories undertake to cooperate in implementing the common programme as set out in Annex II and to make every effort to ensure that the necessary funds are made available.

The possible forms of participation in COST Project 30 are set out in Section 2. Section 3 contains provisions on the entry into force, the period of validity, procedure for making changes to the text and the possible withdrawal of a signatory. The period of validity is set at three years but this may be extended simply by arrangement between signatories. Section 4 stipulates the procedural details of signature and Section 5 lays down that the General Secretariat of the Council of the European Communities shall be responsible for the safekeeping of the Memorandum of Understanding and for transmitting true copies to each of the signatories.

8. In order to avoid the cumbersome and time-consuming procedure of ratification by the national parliaments, it was decided to make do with a simple declaration of intent. Although the Committee on Regional Policy, Regional Planning and Transport can understand this argument, it nevertheless regrets that more stringent obligations cannot be imposed on the participant states.

For if a signatory is able to terminate its participation at any moment in COST Project 30 pursuant to Section 3(3) of the Memorandum of Understanding - provided it notifies the other signatories at least three months in advance - this could in certain cases place the success of the project itself in jeopardy. Clearly, if an essential partner for the project or for an important part of it fails to cooperate, the project itself could be stopped or certain fundamental parts of it could be cancelled. A similar situation could arise if several participants decided to withdraw from the project and, by so doing, left the Management Committee no choice but to terminate the memorandum of understanding pursuant to Section 3(4). In order to avoid such an eventuality, it would seem appropriate to study in what way COST Project 30 could best be brought to a satisfactory conclusion.

9. Annex I, 'Coordination of the project' gives more details about the procedure. Coordination will be the responsibility of a Management Committee to be composed of not more than two representatives for each signatory. The Committee is to be responsible for the choice of research topics, following the progress of research activities, exchanging the results, giving advice, drawing up annual interim reports and the final report and dealing with any problems which may arise.

Annex I also contains a number of provisions on the distribution and utilization of the research results and the protection of industrial property rights.

10. It is perhaps worth noting that, under the procedure of COST Project 30, one signatory acts as the coordinating country for each research topic. On 31 March 1977 nine countries signed the Memorandum of Understanding, namely Belgium, the Federal Republic of Germany, France, Italy, the United Kingdom, Austria, Sweden, Switzerland and Finland. Therefore the Memorandum of Understanding took effect on that date pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 (1) which stipulate signature by at least five Signatories. The Netherlands signed the Memorandum on 18 May. Yugoslavia is reported to be intending to sign it at an early date.

11. Finally, it should be noted that the cost of the project on electronic traffic aids on major roads is estimated at approximately 5 million u.a. at last year's prices.

In November 1975 the Council decided that Community participation in the project should not be a charge on the Community budget.

III. THE SIGNIFICANCE FOR TRANSPORT OF COST PROJECT 30

12. The research programme now proposed comprises the following topics¹:

1. Local aural communication inside vehicles
(France - 600,000 u.a.)
2. Internal visual communication
(United Kingdom - 100,000 u.a.)
3. Variable signs outside the vehicle
(Federal Republic of Germany - 1,375,000 u.a.)
4. Area broadcasting of traffic information
(Netherlands - 237,000 u.a.)
5. Survey of information needs
(France - 200,000 u.a.)
6. Incident detection
(Sweden - 600,000 u.a.)
7. Coordination on intelligibility of messages
(Belgium - 15,000 u.a.)
8. Automatic detection of bad weather conditions
(Finland - 1,140,000 u.a.)
9. Control centre equipment, control strategies, data transmission,
methods of assessment
(Switzerland - 70,000 u.a.)

13. The reason given in the first recital of the draft Decision for the Community's participation in the implementation of COST Project 30 is that it will help to make more efficient use of the road infrastructure and to improve road safety.

14. A close examination of the objectives and the concrete programme for the various research topics as set out in Annex II will reveal that the concern felt at the large number of road accident victims in Europe is a central factor.

Road safety may, it is hoped, be increased by getting suitable traffic information to the road user either by aural messages (topic 1), visual communication in the vehicle (topic 2), visual signs along highways (topic 3) or area broadcasting of traffic information (topic 4).

¹ The coordinating country and an estimate of the costs on the basis of 1976 prices is given in brackets.

Topic 8 is particularly important for improving road safety. The Committee on Regional Policy, Regional Planning and Transport is convinced that suitable information on weather conditions - and, in particular, sudden dangerous meteorological changes - can appreciably reduce the number of road accidents due to poor visibility, high winds, sudden gusts of wind, skid risk due to rain, hail, snow, ice, etc.

15. The aim of topic 5 is to assess the value of the various driver communication systems now under study with road users themselves with a view to making better use of motor roads. Topic 6 deals with the efficient detection of traffic accidents in order to make possible swift intervention and thus achieve more efficient utilization of roads.

It goes without saying that information about traffic congestion or delays due to accidents or weather conditions, with the possibility of suggesting to the driver of the vehicle the optimum or at least an alternative route, could contribute to an increase in the flow capacity of major European highways and a reduction in energy consumption.

16. The aim of research topic 7 is to ensure the maximum clarity in the transmission of traffic information. Efforts are being made to eliminate, through the use of simple and appropriate terminology, ambiguity and indistinctness in the communication of messages or instructions. A comparative study seems most appropriate if only on account of the inevitable linguistic problems.

For the sake of completeness it should be pointed out that topic 9 is concerned with the questions of data processing (computers), control strategies for communication systems, control centre equipment and so on.

17. Without wishing at this point to criticise the proposed COST project, your rapporteur would nevertheless point out that the final application of the findings of the study projects will require enormous investment. He therefore considers it desirable that, in view of the recent trimming of government budgets following the economic crisis, cost-benefit analyses should be carried out as soon as possible so that, should the funds available prove insufficient, a system of priorities can be drawn up.

The Committee on Regional Policy, Regional Planning and Transport also urges the Commission to examine as soon as possible how the cost of conducting this research can be recovered from road users. In 1973 in the report by Mr Kollwelter on a proposal from the Commission for a decision on the introduction of a common system of payment for the use of transport infrastructures¹, it approved in principle the proposed system of payment since

'a rational price policy can only be developed if costs are correctly charged and since competition between the different forms of transport can only produce the correct overall economic results on the basis of such a price policy'¹.

18. Since application of the research results will in any case require a more or less high financial contribution from transport users, it would also seem reasonable to examine what electronic aids would be particularly welcomed by the majority of drivers. This could be carried out as part of topic 5 (survey of information needs).

19. In the interests of greater road safety and better utilization of the existing transport infrastructure in the whole of Western Europe, and with a view to achieving a genuinely standardized European system, your committee would urge those European states which have become a party to the COST programme as such but not yet to COST Project 30, to sign the Memorandum of Understanding at the earliest opportunity.

20. During a preliminary discussion in committee of COST Project 30 on 25 May 1977, your rapporteur and several members expressed their concern at the possible dangers of giving excessive information to road users.

Some committee members felt that the installation in vehicles of visual communication equipment to give drivers details of optimum routes and speeds and warnings of unfavourable weather conditions could be dangerous because it might distract the driver or inspire excessive confidence in the information given. Inundating the road user aurally with traffic information could also lead to similar dangers.

21. Consequently the Committee on Regional Policy, Regional Planning and Transport urges that before any electronic devices are introduced :

- exhaustive broadly-based tests on the reactions of road users to the various systems should be carried out within the framework of Topic 9;
- an investigation should be carried out into how aurally transmitted traffic information can be restricted to essentials (for example, by the provision of purely regional and local data when road conditions require this).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

22. For the reasons set out above, particularly those relating to greater road safety, better utilization of existing transport infrastructure and a reduction in energy consumption, the Committee on Regional Policy, Regional Planning and Transport approves the Commission's proposal subject to the reservations contained in points 20 and 21 and expresses the hope that COST Project 30 may soon yield positive results throughout Western Europe.

¹ See paragraph 1 of the resolution contained in report Doc. 195/73.

OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND RESEARCH

Draftsman : Mr L. KRALL.

On 26 April 1977 the Committee on Energy and Research appointed Mr L. KRALL draftsman.

It considered the draft opinion at its meetings of 17 and 26 May 1977 and adopted it unanimously on 26 May.

Present: Mrs H. Walz, chairman; Mr Normanton, vice-chairman; Mr Krall, draftsman; Lord Bessborough, Mr Brown, Mr Dalyell, Mr Edwards, Mr Giraud, Mr F. Hansen (deputizing for Mr Holst), Mr Houdet, Mr Liogier, Mr W. Müller, Mr Knud Nielsen, Mr Osborn, Mr Pintat and Mr Zeyer.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present proposal is that the Council should subscribe on behalf of the Community to a joint declaration of intent to implement a European research and development project in the field of scientific and technical cooperation (COST Agreement). The adoption of this particular project concerning electronic traffic aids on major roads has been prompted by the continuing expansion of traffic and the consequent congestion and accident rates. The ultimate aim of the project is to establish a standard European system to improve traffic control and safety.

2. Eleven European States, including six Member States of the Community and the Community itself, have finalized this programme. The declaration of intent, or 'Memorandum of Understanding' as it is officially styled, is open for signature by the nineteen COST States and the Community and takes effect when at least five countries have signed it. It should be noted that it has in fact already come into force since nine countries including six EEC Member States, signed the declaration of intent on 31.3.1977.

3. The research programme, which is to run for three years and may be extended, will cover nine topics. For the present, eleven COST States intend to take part in two or more of the nine research topics; only one country is taking part in all of them. For each topic one of the participating countries will take on the function of coordinator while a Management Committee will undertake coordination of the whole COST project.

4. The committee responsible is competent to examine the merits of the research topics proposed from the point of view of transport technology. The Committee on Energy and Research sees its task as being to examine how far the organizational structure will ensure satisfactory coordination of the research project.

II. COMMENTS ON THE COORDINATION OF THE PROJECT

5. Coordination of the whole project will be undertaken by a Management Committee composed of not more than two representatives for each Signatory, who will normally be national officials responsible for research and traffic safety. Until the Community becomes a Signatory, its representative may attend Committee meetings as an observer.

6. In order to ensure implementation of the project the Committee shall take such measures as are needed to carry out the following tasks:

- (a) to select research topics,

- (b) to keep abreast of all relevant research,
- (c) to exchange research results,
- (d) to give advice,
- (e) to provide information and
- (f) to deal with any problems that may arise out of the execution of the project.

7. With regard to the concrete measures to be taken, the Commission stated that the Management Committee has no legal powers to implement special measures. Cooperation is entirely on a voluntary basis, a system that has hitherto worked smoothly.

III. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT

8. The project will probably give positive results provided that there is open and willing cooperation between the countries involved in each separate research topic and particularly on the part of the country which is coordinating it. The Community's role would seem to be limited to the influence it can exercise in the Management Committee. The Committee on Energy and Research would be pleased if, as has happened in the past, the Commission would provide secretarial services for this COST project, even though the Memorandum of Understanding does not contain any separate Article to this effect - in previous COST agreements it was generally Article 6 or 7.

9. The industrial property rights to results obtained from this research project belong in the case of on-going research topics to the Signatories. By signing the Memorandum of Understanding they acknowledge their intention of allowing the other Signatories, if they wish, access to the utilization of the results obtained. This will take place by the granting of licences, and hence research and development contracts which are entered into as part of this COST project must include clauses to this effect.

10. It would seem self-evident that the success of the project will depend on a willingness by the Signatories to observe the provisions. This is a declaration of intent in which the central Management Committee cannot be given real powers of decision over disputes between the Signatories if these should occur.

IV. CONCLUSION

11. The committee attaches particular importance to the intention to decide after two years whether to hold a demonstration test. The construction and financing of a test track and the results obtained could form a vital part of a joint European transport policy.

12. It is regrettable that not all the Member States of the Community have subscribed to this COST agreement. However, the committee would welcome participation by the Community as such, since this would mean the start - at Community level - of the necessary research in the transport policy sector. This research project, which is intended to support national efforts, could be seen as an important element of transport policy.

13. Although the Memorandum of Understanding has little binding force in law, the European Parliament expects the project to be as successful as previous COST agreements. The Committee on Energy and Research therefore recommends that the Community should support the proposal by signing the Memorandum of Understanding.

