

INFORMATION**T R A N S P O R T**

New perspectives for the common transport policy

56/74

1973 was a year of deepening awareness and fresh impetus in the field of common transport policy. The common policy had lost momentum on account of the completion in 1970 of the partial programme adopted by the Council on 14 December 1967 (1). Although some important proposals were adopted most of the regulations adopted by the Council since the end of 1970 merely adapted or prolonged measures already in force.

It was clear that the common transport policy had reached an impasse. The Council did not meet in 1973 to examine transport questions until the end of November, despite the need to settle a number of important and urgent problems such as the harmonization of the weights and dimensions of commercial vehicles, changes to national systems to taxation on commercial vehicles and arrangements for quotas of the new Member States within the Community quota of authorizations for the carriage of goods by road.

On several occasions in previous years the Commission declared its concern over this state of affairs, particularly in statements to the European Parliament and to the Council, in which it made clear its wish to give a fresh impetus and a new dimension to the development of this policy by strengthening its ties with other Community activities.

So, in 1973, the Commission stepped up its activity on these lines. On May 30 a Commission working paper (2) was sent to the Council, the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee, as a basis for debate with the Council for a clearer definition of the role of the common transport policy in the enlarged Community.

On October 24, 1973, the Commission placed before the Council a memorandum on the development of the common transport policy (3). This was a general paper intended to re-activate the common policy. It set out both the objectives and the steps necessary to ensure that transport facilities meet the requirements of an enlarged Community undergoing profound economic and technological changes and new aspects in the protection of living and working conditions in modern society. The memorandum showed in particular that the continuance of the vigorous expansion which has marked the transport sector over the last ten years came up against a number of factors, notably congestion, the increasing rarity of natural resources and the need to protect the environment. The Commission considered that this trend might provoke national intervention, which would only further compartmentalize the transport market into separate national systems, thus preventing Community integration.

The memorandum defined the objectives of a Community policy for Community transport arrangements and explained that, while maintaining previous guidelines, they should be supplemented by new guidelines based on the aims set out by the Paris Summit Conference of October 1972. These would make the common transport policy a factor of social progress, closely linked to other Community activity, and respond to public transport needs as well as contribute to the improvement of the living and working conditions of employees in this sector. This concept of common transport policy means that public authorities must identify their options taking particular note of infrastructure, the application of new technology and the adaptation of organizational techniques. Infrastructure use should be charged and this would influence transport users towards a more rational use of transport space and facilities.

The Commission therefore considered that public authorities should manage common transport policy to a greater degree, leaving the Community institutions free to map out the broad lines of a Community-wide transport network within which the Member States would work out their own plans. In such a framework the transport market would function on a free basis (subject to certain correctives), particularly on the question of carriage of goods. Public authorities may be expected to

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support urban passenger services as a means of improving public transport. Measures should also be taken regarding the structure of undertakings.

Such a Community transport system would be progressively established over the next ten years, in parallel and in harmony with economic and monetary union. The Commission's memorandum therefore concluded with a long-term work-programme whose first stage is a short-term action-programme (1974-76) which takes account of policy requirements, progress in the work of Community institutions and the degree of urgency of the measures planned. The programme set out the initiatives which the Commission plans to take and the proposals already submitted to the Council which call for priority decisions.

At its session on 22 November 1973, on transport problems, the Council examined the Commission's memorandum. Although the Council could not yet be expected to take a stand on the guidelines suggested by the Commission, it was sensitive to the need to further the implementation of the common transport policy.

After a general exchange of views on the memorandum, it instructed the Permanent Representatives Committee to continue to study the transport proposals made to the Council in order for work to proceed. The Council urged the need to take account both of the guidelines mapped out by the Commission and the Council's own conclusions. It also instructed the Permanent Representatives Committee to pursue the dialogue with the Commission on the future orientation of the common transport policy.

It must be admitted that the Commission's efforts to give fresh impetus to the common transport policy have not yet produced tangible results. The Commission will see that future Council work is increasingly relevant to the developments advocated in its Communication and that earlier proposals are adopted and new ones presented for the new departure in the common transport policy as soon as possible.

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The difficult energy supply situation which arose towards the end of 1973 is a very clear example of the growing shortages in natural resources referred to in the Commission's memorandum and of the need for close liaison with other Community policies. Commission departments are studying the impact of the oil shortage on transport and are considering how consumption might be reduced with the least inconvenience for the transport industry.

To conclude, it should be noted that the importance and urgency of transport problems are now clearly stated. Community institutions must now take the necessary steps on the basis of the Commission's analysis in its memorandum of 24 October 1973.

(1) OJ 322 of 30.12.1967

(2) Bull. EC 6-1973, point 2257

(3) Supplement 16/73 - Bull. EC and Bull. 10-1973, point 2265.

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