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INFRASTRUCTURE

A SYSTEMS APPROACH

An address by Mr. Richard Burke
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Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to take the opportunity which this occasion provides to outline some of the ideas on the development of a European transport infrastructure system which I have recently put forward in a Green Paper, adopted by the Commission.

I have used the expression "infrastructure system" advisedly because I believe that we must view transport not as an administrative structure decked with permits, quotas and prohibitions, but as a system in which modes interact with one another to achieve an economic operation in such a way as to require the minimum call on resources or, to put it another way, to produce the best use of resources.

What, after all, is transport activity? It is simply an extension of the productive process from the point of primary production to that of consumption. Its inputs are natural resources - primarily land and energy, real capital and technology. It poses options which offer a variety of possible solutions and trade-offs. It is in short an economic function susceptible to the techniques of analytic management and best treated as such.

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This, then brings me to my recent Green Paper.

Despite what some people may have thought, this document does not propose a collection of grandiose projects intended to change dramatically the whole network of major traffic arteries in the Community. Its aim is both more modest and in a way more ambitious.

More modest, because it contains only a few paragraphs giving as examples some links which deserve special attention. More ambitious, because it aims at an integrated approach to the Common Transport Policy, in which infrastructure policy serves as both the corner-stone and the link with other common policies. And I am giving away no secret if I say that some of these other policies are obviously much more advanced than the Common Transport Policy.

At this stage, the most suitable means of putting forward our ideas was a discussion paper enabling us to open a debate with all who are interested in the future of transport infrastructure. A colloquy to be held during the first half of 1980 will enable us to draw conclusions from this debate.

The Commission decision mandating me to draw up that green paper was motivated by two main considerations :

Firstly, the urgent need for Community action in the field of infrastructure arising from the following factors :

- the growth of international traffic in the Community at a significantly faster rate than of domestic traffic, and the likelihood that this development could place an excessive burden on some transit countries;
- the new constraints, particularly in respect of energy and the environment, which are making themselves felt more and more and which require us at Community level to seek and encourage new approaches to transport;
- the difficulties of distance and inaccessibility from which some peripheral regions suffer, and which are likely to become even more troublesome with the accession of new Member States;
- more generally, the difficulties encountered by national authorities in financing infrastructure works, particularly those which are of more than national interest

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These are the main problems we have to confront. But the second consideration which moved us to act now was the emergence of new circumstances which give us the means to act effectively. There has been a definite enlargement of the range of instruments available to the Community to help it to meet its needs. The first results of a vast study programme are now available for use in evaluating the Community's infrastructure requirements. A new consultation procedure has been established among us and an Infrastructure Committee created : this is a subject I want to come back to. Thirdly, there has been a growth in the financial resources available to the Community for intervention of various kinds, including support - within strictly defined limits - for certain types of transport infrastructure. These resources derive from the European Investment Bank, the Regional Development Fund, the new financial instrument associated with the name of Vice-President Ortoli, and the finances released through the European Monetary System.

The memorandum includes an inventory of the needs and the available means and proposes a programme comprising :

- the continuation of studies to help evaluate the needs,
 - the improvement of coordination between Member States of their projects and plans,
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- the provision at Community level of specific financing means adapted to the requirements of action in the field of transport infrastructure. In other words, we need the tools which will enable us to take action clearly directed to the execution of projects of special importance for the Community in cases where the national interest in the project is not strong enough.

It may be that without Community intervention a project may never be carried out; in other cases, intervention may be necessary to ensure that a project is carried out within a desired time limit or to ensure that the design of the project meets the needs of the Community. However, the Commission has become aware of the fact that the existing instruments can contribute only to a very limited extent to attaining these objectives.

I would now like to comment on the three aspects of the programme of action.

Thanks to a budget credit specifically provided for studies relating to infrastructure, work is progressing satisfactorily and will enable us very soon to achieve the following results:

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- the creation of a forecasting system for freight and passenger transport to enable us to evaluate infrastructure needs on the basis of assumptions relating to economic development and future policies,
 - the formulation of a method for identifying, by means of homogeneous criteria, bottlenecks which have an appreciable effect on Community traffic,
 - the establishment of a method for evaluating the interest to the Community of a project. This study has been given some publicity because it covers a practical application to various possible fixed links across the Channel. The study is not intended, as some think, to enable the Commission to choose either a tunnel or a bridge, but to assess the advantages of the alternatives and to define the conditions under which the interest to the Community of a given solution would be maximised.

The tasks of the Consultative Committee which I have had established are wide-ranging and very important. Besides its basic task of consultation on projects and exchange of information on plans and programmes, it can also, at the Commission's request, examine any question concerning the development of the transport network of interest to the Community. The Commission

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does not want to deprive the Committee of this role, clearly specified in the Decision of 1978; nor should the Committee itself fail to fulfill its responsibilities at the very time when infrastructure problems are becoming more complex and more important.

I hope that the work at present being carried out by the Commission will lead to the early adoption of the regulation which will enable us to finance projects, and that the results of the work will be interpreted realistically. Nobody should expect us to be able within a few months to draw up on the basis of these reports a list of projects all ready to be carried out.

It is nevertheless possible, on the basis of existing information, to undertake an analysis of traffic conditions on many routes of Community importance. This reveals some obvious inadequacies in the capacity or the quality of infrastructure and makes it possible to identify provisionally some links which merit particular attention.

From this perspective, we can point out a number of links which have already been the subject of projects in varying degrees of development.

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These links, grouped by category, are given here by way of illustration. It is clear that they must be amended or completed later, as and when the analysis of the quality of service over the whole of the Community is refined.

It should also be pointed out that the mention of these links does not prejudge the results of any detailed assessments which have to be undertaken later in collaboration with the Member States concerned.

I would first mention international links between major centres. The following rail links are typical of this category :

Brussels - Cologne, Utrecht - Cologne - Frankfurt,
Amsterdam - Brussels - Luxembourg - Strasbourg.

Next, links with peripheral regions. There are many of these; as examples I think of :

in Ireland, links with the North (Dublin - Belfast - Derry), and with the West (Dublin - Cork/Galway);
in the United Kingdom, links with East-Anglia - notably the ports; in Italy, links with the Mezzogiorno and the Islands.

There are then links affected by the entry of New Member States. These both land and sea, merit special attention not only because new Member States are joining the Community but because of the expected increase in traffic following the adhesion of Greece, Spain and Portugal.

Next, one may mention links designed to overcome natural obstacles.

There are of course many points where the sea or mountains greatly affect the quality of service, but where our technological resources might now be able to achieve a dramatic improvement. These include the Channel crossing, the link between Germany and Denmark (via Fehmarn), links between Germany and Italy and the Apennine crossings.

Finally, there are what I would call the 'missing links' between existing networks, areas where the infrastructure does not adequately match the quality found in the neighbouring networks. Of these 'missing links' I would mention by way of example connections between Belgium and France, and between the North Sea and the Mediterranean via a Rhine-Rhône canal; and, thinking of the motorway network, the route linking Thionville, Luxembourg and Trier.

The role of selective financial aid from the Community will be to accelerate the completion of projects on such links: they will be submitted by the Member States and their financial and economic aspects will be examined, with the assistance of the infrastructure committee. I believe it will be possible to examine a number of projects each year.

The cost of such a plan will not be trivial. Motorways alone are now running to £4 million a mile, and I would reckon that in today's prices the cost of developing the major Community interest links I have outlined - or a similar agreed series of roads, tunnels, bridges and canals - would be of the order of £20 billion. This is a significant sum but, as our American friends would say, to make it one must spend it.