

I R U CONFERENCE

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DEVELOPMENTS IN THE
COMMON TRANSPORT POLICY.

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Let me begin by saying how pleased I am to have this opportunity of saying a few words today about some of the current issues of Community transport policy. I propose to confine myself to matters of particular interest to road transport, and to begin with the basic question of transport infrastructure.

I am sure it is hardly necessary to stress before this audience, Mr Chairman, the vital role of the transport industry in the economic and social wellbeing of the Community. The network of high class motorways and main railways that now span the Community are the physical expression of how this industry has broken down barriers. However, demand for transport is continually growing and, possibly more important, the pattern is changing : new Member States will be joining the Community, new industries are being established. Faced with this situation I am convinced that the Community has an important role to play in planning our major transport arteries.

The new approach to the development of transport infrastructure at Community level that was set out in the Memorandum issued last November rests upon two closely integrated measures :

Firstly, a continuous dialogue between the Member States and the Commission on current issues and on longer term plans. A permanent Committee of senior officials of the Member States has been established for this purpose and has already started its work by looking at acute problems in the existing network.

Secondly, in order that the Community's interests are considered in the national planning and budgetary processes, a financial instrument whereby projects of Community interest could receive assistance has been proposed to the Council of Ministers.

Before leaving this subject I would also like to mention that the substantial growth of traffic from and to non-Members, plus of course the accession of Greece, has prompted the Commission to consider how aid might be given to justifiable projects outside the Community. What we have proposed to the Council is that the financial instrument that they are currently discussing should be extended to include projects of Community interest in non-Member countries. A possible example of a project where there could be an interest for the Community to provide some form of assistance concerns the Phyrn autoroute in Austria. The Austrian government has put forward a request to the Commission to provide assistance on this route which is of particular importance for the movement of traffic to and from Greece. The Commission has given a favourable reception to the request and discussions are continuing.

If the Council adopts the regulation establishing this financial instrument, I am sure that this will have a positive effect by providing an incentive for Member States to look again at projects which, however valuable in terms of their overall benefits, cannot be financed by national means alone. For the first time there is a chance that the Community will have some influence on determining the planning and inception of the new roads and other links it needs in order to keep up, even reinforce, the momentum it has developed to improve living standards in the Community. In a period when monetary restrictions are imposing limits on the level of activity everywhere in the Community I am not proposing any ill-thought-through measures which will increase activity without the necessary clear and full justification. Rather, I believe the Commission's policy to be realistic and fully in keeping with our overall objective - to ensure we get value for money from national and, of course, Community infrastructure.

It is, I am sure, clear to all of you that there are certain evident shortcomings in the road system even today ; as traffic continues to develop these shortcomings become more serious, and others will appear. The time to plan for these gaps to be overcome is now. I believe that Community activity as a whole can alone give us the objective long term view that is essential to solve these problems efficiently. I have presented the Council of Ministers with the information which I believe justifies these arguments; I hope now that they will be in a position to move forward. The situation is not improving, we need to start as soon as possible to prepare

plans to cope with these problems. The key lies with the Council; I hope they will have the conviction to use it.

A word now, Mr Chairman, about vehicle weights and dimensions. The Commission believes that a Community agreement on vehicle weights and dimensions is essential to the advancement of the Common Transport Policy. The Commission's first proposal in this field was made in 1962, nearly twenty years ago. We hope and trust that the Council is near to agreement on dimensions, which are already, in practice, very similar in the nine Member States. Our new proposal on weights (issued in January 1979) has already been discussed by the Economic and Social Committee, which, as you probably know, has agreed with our axle weight limits, but takes a more cautious view of gross vehicle weight and proposes a maximum of 40 tonnes instead of 44. The European Parliament is at present examining our new proposals and we hope that the Community's transport ministers will be able to take up the problem again in the second half of this year.

The Member States have widely diverging views on the relative importance of such factors as energy economy, environmental protection and inter-modal competition, and the range of possible agreement on the vehicle weights issue is extremely narrow. Our present weights proposal is based on extensive discussions with hauliers, including representatives of the IRU, the motor industry and

other interested groups. I believe that our new proposal offers a flexible, practical and realistic solution to the problem and I strongly urge the IRU to support us in our efforts to reach agreement as soon as possible.

As regards commercial road vehicle taxation we have concentrated our efforts since June 1978 on removing Netherlands and Italian reservations to the formal adoption of the first directive in this field, and we understand that the Netherlands would now agree. Unfortunately the Italian position still remains negative and certain opportunities to smooth the way for eventual adoption have not been taken by the Government. We shall continue to press hard for a change of mind. On the other hand I can record with satisfaction that the tax changes proposed for adoption in the United Kingdom in 1982 or 1983 will be fully in line with the directive.

Turning now to the question of progress towards a Community driving licence, I might remind you that we already have an agreement in principle from the Council of Ministers on the adoption of a Community driving licence, and we hope that the remaining difficulties can be cleared up and a firm decision taken in the course of this year. The proposals provide for a common format for the Community driving licence, with free exchange of licences for those who have qualified in their own country who decide to take up residence in another Member State.

I hope we shall be able to give a lead in this way in the transport field with a personal document for citizens of the EEC which will underline the right of free establishment and the sense of belonging to a wider Community. We also see the Community driving licence as a first step towards the development of high uniform standards of driving skill and of road safety.

I should now like to move on to questions of observation and organisation of the road transport market.

First, as far as access to the market for the transport of goods by road is concerned, in order to allow road transport undertakings to improve their productivity, and also to take account of the need to reduce energy consumption, the services of the Commission are at present studying, and I hope the Commission will soon be proposing, measures aiming at :

- the issue of licences to the tractive unit;
- reduction of unladen journeys; and
- improvement of cooperation between road transport undertakings.

As far as the carriage of passengers is concerned, the negotiations with the other ECMT countries for the purpose of drawing up an agreement for liberalising a major part of the occasional services between Member States and third countries have just ended with the initialling of an agreement on 23 April. This agreement will allow the carriers from 19 countries to organise their services better

and thus respond to demand in a more flexible and rapid way. For this reason, and because it is the first agreement between the Community as such and third countries within the transport sector, this agreement is of particular significance.

At present, the Commission's services are examining the question of competition in road transport by state trading countries. I would certainly not exclude at this stage that the Commission will send to the Council a proposal for common action in this field by the end of the year.

May I comment briefly on the Market observation system. The objective of this work is to provide information and analysis on the developments in inland transport between the Member States of the Community.

This work is important :

- as an aid in policy development;
- in providing the transport operator and his association with a better understanding of their business environment.

The detail of this work has been discussed with your Liaison Committee and is progressing well notwithstanding serious budgetary constraints.

This progress is due in no small way to the constructive attitude adopted by your organisation.

In assessing the success of this experiment I consider it important that you as transporters find information on trends in demand prices, costs and the other elements useful.

In the light of the positive results obtained in the combined transport sector following the Council Directive of 1975, retained on a permanent basis and extended on an experimental basis to containers by the Directive of 1979, the Commission foresees as a task for the immediate future negotiations with third countries for their active participation in the liberalized regime set up by the Directives. The Commission is convinced that the extension of the territorial scope of application of these measures can only stimulate the efficiency and overall profitability of this transport technique. On the other hand the services of the Commission continue their studies on measures to promote the use of combined transport, in particular measures in the field of taxes, tariffs and aid for infrastructure. In this respect proposals will be worked out in the next few months.

As for tariffs for international road haulage, the existing system, involving the co-existence of compulsory bracket tariffs on the one hand and of reference tariffs of an indicative nature on the other, will, I believe, have to be replaced by a new regime, set up in the light of the experience gained by the application of both tariff

systems. I can assure you that the Commission will do its utmost to ensure that the proposal it has to put forward for approval by the Council in 1982 will satisfy the economic interest of the Community and, in particular, of the socio-economic groups directly concerned with transport.

Mr President,

In the short time at my disposal, it was possible to raise only some key items concerning international road haulage in the Community. An "in-depth" analysis was certainly not possible.

Let me end by underlying that in Brussels the Commission is not working towards a common transport policy simply for the sake of such a policy, but because we believe that certain common rules are necessary in order to reflect the needs and interests of all modes of transport and all consumers of transport. In the overall web of transport relationships road haulage plays a most important role. It is my strong conviction that in the changing world of today, where changes sometimes seem to be coming too quickly, your sector will be able to adapt itself successfully to new challenges. I wish your Congress every success.