

## Keep Europe Moving – Sustainable Mobility for our continent

### Mid-term review of the European Commission's 2001 Transport White Paper

#### *pteg response*

1. *pteg* welcomes the evolution of EU transport policy to take account of trends which have arisen since the White Paper was first produced. In particular, the enlargement of the Union presents a Commission with difficult dilemma. The merits of a twin-track approach to take account of the varying needs of a diverse continent by the application of locationally-appropriate policies are noted, however this will inevitably weaken the potency of measures designed to minimise environmental harm. Economic sluggishness should not become a reason to dilute sustainable transport practices, and the creation of a Europe-wide transport market and the realisation of the Lisbon agenda should not be at the expense of reducing the high level of environmental protection advocated at the outset. Also, certain countries including the UK have enjoyed strong economic growth in the last five years which has placed severe pressure upon transport infrastructure, and here the need for investment in additional public transport capacity is as important as in less successful areas.
2. Better urban public transport is about stimulating local economic growth and promoting social inclusion, as well as environmental sustainability - understanding the full long-term impact of public transport is vital to its future. Conurbation and region-wide public transport networks can stimulate the former without unduly prejudicing the latter.
3. Charging for car and lorry use as referred in Section 6.3 is not just concerned with charging for the costs of infrastructure, but providing new revenue streams to support attractive public transport, walking and cycling alternatives. In analysing the merits of Community action on urban infrastructure charging, city and public transport authorities must retain the freedom to establish congestion charging schemes that reflect their individual circumstances and tackle their unique problems. In this regard *pteg* looks forward to the publication of a green paper on urban transport examining where action at a European level could help provide solutions.
4. Public transport vehicles need to improve their environmental performance not just cars. EU regulation is a key driver for change

in this area. The continuing tightening of Euro emissions in this regard is welcomed but this needs to go hand in hand with more focused EU funding to stimulate new technological take-up. The Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) should concentrate on practical, large scale initiatives rather than small scale demonstration projects which are theoretical in nature.

5. The mid-term review has the difficult task of reconciling the differing needs and priorities of a hugely disparate EU where the GDP of the richest nation is six times that of the poorest. This is reflected in the twin-track approach of reducing congestion in the wealthier Member States and improving accessibility in the less advanced and more peripheral regions. The resulting toolkit faces the charge of applying different standards based upon need rather than the wider good of the continent's environment.
6. The failure to fully acknowledge the adverse environmental impacts of short-haul air travel is regrettable. The huge growth in the sector is portrayed, on balance, as a positive development. In practice, many short distance air links can be made more quickly, and with less detriment to the environment, by rail. More journeys made by air relative to rail weaken the case for the development of the rail network, a more sustainable and versatile mode carrying freight as well as people. The review states that greenhouse gas emissions from air transport have increased by over 4% per year for the last decade, but fails to suggest any reining-in of the future expansion of the sector. Emissions trading, alluded to in section 3.2, is no substitute for absolute decreases in the quantity of pollutants released into the atmosphere by aircraft.
7. Section 6.1 signals that the co-financing of transport infrastructure by structural and cohesion funds will be concentrated in Member States with structural handicaps or an 'accessibility deficit'. This policy will hamper the efforts of nations with strong economies with high levels of congestion such as the UK to achieve faster modal shift by investing heavily in public transport infrastructure.
8. The continued emphasis upon integration across modes and the use of technology and innovation to produce productivity and efficiency gains is welcomed, however the achievement of these aims in the context of the continued liberalisation and deregulation of the public transport market is questionable - as has been shown by the experiences of the deregulated British bus industry over a 20-year period. 'Regulation needs to go hand-in-hand with innovation' is asserted in the review, however this conflicting balance is perhaps easier to aspire towards than to achieve in practice.

9. The reference in section 3.1 to the examination of the narrowing of 'excessive differences' in fuel tax levels is interesting in the context of the UK's position at the head of the league of member nations in terms of fuel taxation. The high level of UK fuel duty has undoubtedly been a brake on even higher increases in the rate of road vehicle kilometres than have taken place in recent years; it is hoped that any movement towards fuel tax harmonisation will encourage duty increases elsewhere, rather than reducing the real-terms value in the UK which has proven environmental benefits and provides an income stream for other areas of government expenditure.
  
10. In summary, *pteg* welcomes the continued encouragement given by the review to the development of public transport networks, co-modality and technological development through innovation. However, in attempting to reflect the many different characteristics of the EU, the thrust of the White Paper's desire for more sustainable patterns of movement has been blunted. Relative economic under-performance should not necessarily be coupled with increased accessibility, if this is at the expense of environmental sustainability: air pollution is no respecter of Member State boundaries.